atari * nintendo * sega * intv * commodore * apple * sony * coleco * etc

classic gamer magazine

Vol. 3
Issue 1

TURNS 30!

PLUS

Worse Than E.T.
Arcade on the PSP
SNES vs. Genesis
and more...

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Classic Gamer Magazine
Vol. 3, Issue #1

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contents

24 Cover Story:
The Pac-Man Legacy

4 Staff
5 Classic Gaming Expo 2010
6 Nintendo @ E3
7 Batter Up! A Visual History of NES Baseball
8 Super NES vs. Sega Genesis
13 Bringing the Past Back to Life
16 It's War! Classics vs. Remakes
18 Five Atari 2600 Games Worse Than E.T.
21 Podcast Review: RetroGaming Roundup
23 Revenge of the Birds
34 Shovelware Alert! Astro Invaders
35 Pixel Memories
39 Prince of Persia: The Forgotten Sands
41 Arcade ... To Go
46 Another Trip Inside Haunted House
47 3D Dot Game Heroes Review
49 What's New in Arcades?
51 Words from the Weiss
54 Scott Pilgrim vs. CGM
56 Happy Birthday Pac-Man!

staff

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Christopher Brown learned to write at approximately the same time he learned to play video games, and he has enjoyed doing both for the last 25 years. He received a bachelor's degree in journalism from Eastern Michigan University in 2002, and since 2007 has worked as a full-time writer and editor at Allgame.com, where he has contributed more than 2,000 original reviews and descriptions. Brown has also contributed to Video Game Collector magazine, done freelance travel writing, and written for Detroit-area sports magazines and blogs.

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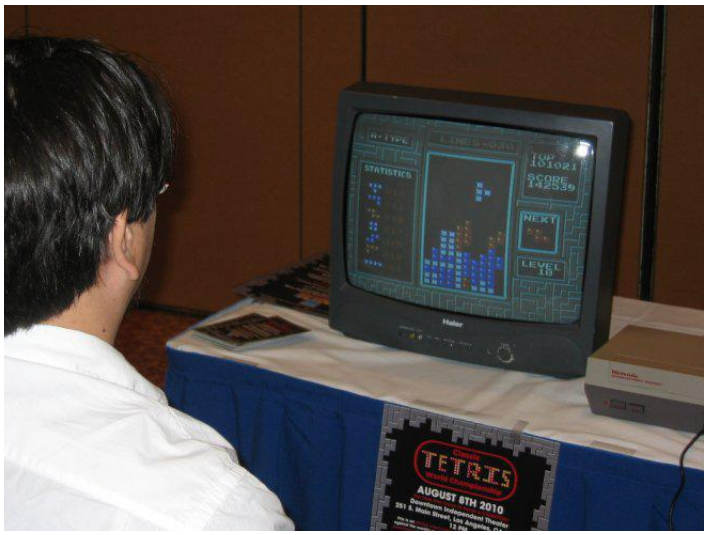
Jonathan Sutyak graduated Arizona State University in 1998 and shortly thereafter became a regular contributor to Allgame.com. He began gaming on the Intellivision and experienced many classics for the first time at the brilliant Funspot arcade. He is also a big fan of Sega's 8-bit and 16-bit consoles.

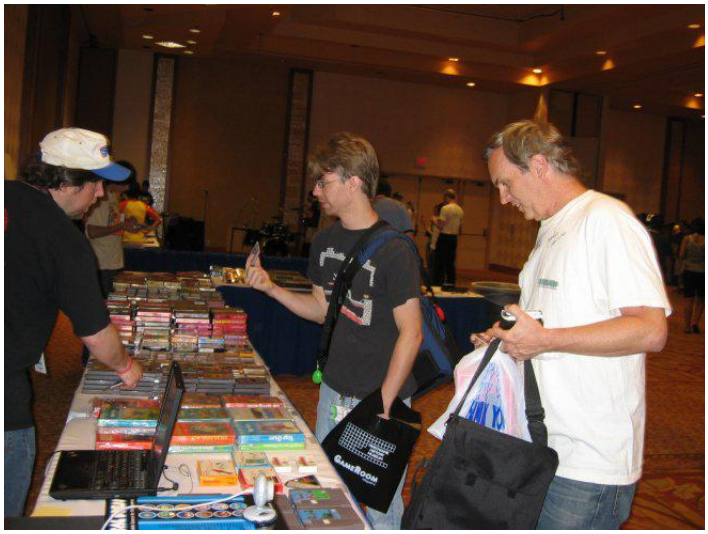
Brett Weiss has written numerous articles that have appeared in Comic Buyer's Guide, Fangoria and Allgame.com. Brett recently authored two books: *Classic Home Video Games: 1972-1984* and *Classic Home Video Games: 1985-1988*.

Classic Gaming Expo 2010

It was “Game on!” once more as Classic Gaming Expo celebrated its 12th anniversary in style at the freshly remodeled Tropicana Hotel in Las Vegas. Neither biker gangs nor roller derby girls nor searing desert heat could stop vintage gaming enthusiasts from enjoying two days of pixelated bliss. Aside from the always entertaining panel discussions featuring speakers from gaming’s past, attendees were also treated to a showing of the movie *Joysticks* and the documentary *Get Lamp*. Couldn’t attend? Never fear. Plans are underway for Classic Gaming Expo 2k11. Visit www.cgexpo.com and www.digitpress.com to stay updated.

-Chris Cavanaugh





Nintendo@E3

Despite revealing a next-generation portable system with a 3D screen, Nintendo didn't forget its roots at E3. Not only did the company announce new titles for long-time favorites Donkey Kong and Kirby, but it also reached back to the early days of the NES to revive a certain mythologically inspired character.

Kid Icarus: Uprising

One of the biggest surprises at Nintendo's E3 keynote address, outside of the 3DS system itself, was the return of *Kid Icarus*, now a 3D action title featuring both aerial and ground combat. You'll guide angel Pit in his fight against Medusa's sinister army, using a limited ability to fly (the power only lasts five minutes) to reach battles on land. The handheld's slider moves Kid Icarus, while the touchscreen controls the camera. Shooting arrows is accomplished by holding down the left bumper. Designed by the man responsible for both *Kirby* and *Super Smash Bros.*, *Uprising* is the first *Kid Icarus* game since 1991.

Donkey Kong Country Returns

Donkey and Diddy return to rumble in the jungle with this side-scrolling follow-up to Rare's *Donkey Kong Country* series. Banana seekers can play solo or team up in co-op mode to locate Kong's stolen hoard while riding mine cars, swinging from vines, and ground-slapping enemies out of the way.

Kirby's Epic Yarn

Everyone's favorite pink puffball returns to weave an all-new platforming adventure on Wii. Now composed of yarn, Kirby can change the fabric of his environments (literally!) by pulling loose threads to reveal hidden locations and needed objects. Plus it just wouldn't be Kirby if he didn't morph himself into a variety of useful items and vehicles, including a parachute, submarine, and UFO.

GoldenEye 007

Xbox 360 fans despair as Rare's beloved *GoldenEye* gets a modern update for Wii. Developed by Eurocom (*007: Nightfire* and N64's *The World is Not Enough*), *GoldenEye* replaces Pierce Brosnan with Daniel Craig and introduces multiple control schemes, from the Wii Remote and Nunchuk combo to the Classic Controller. Split-screen support for up to four players is once again available, this time with a choice of 40 Bond characters. Shoot it out on five maps that can be tailored over 500 ways by using 16 modifiers. *GoldenEye* also features online support for up to eight players.

The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time 3D

Link's most critically acclaimed game is slated to appear on Nintendo's next-gen handheld, along with several other N64 favorites. Guide Link in his first 3D adventure, one that allows him to musically alter time by blowing into the titular instrument. It is unclear whether the game will be a straight port with enhanced controls or one featuring revamped visuals and added bonuses. Either way, fans of the sword-swinging, arrow-slinging hero will want to "listen!" carefully for the game's eventual release date announcement.

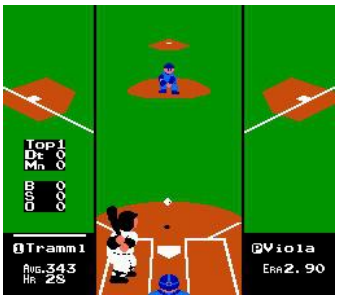
Batter Up! A Visual History of NES Baseball

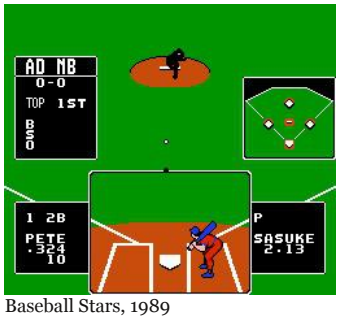
Sports games have always been an important part of a console's lineup, and this was especially true for the NES. From the simply-titled "Baseball" in 1985 to "Bases Loaded 4" seven years later, Nintendo's first home system was graced with 20 versions of the USA's national pasttime.

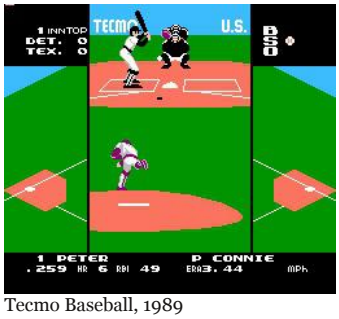
Baseball, 1985

Bases Loaded, 1988

Major League Baseball, 1988


R.B.I Baseball, 1988


Baseball Stars, 1989



Tecmo Baseball, 1989

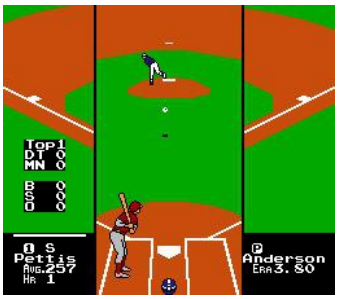
Bases Loaded II, 1990

Baseball Simulator 1.000, 1990

Bad News Baseball, 1990

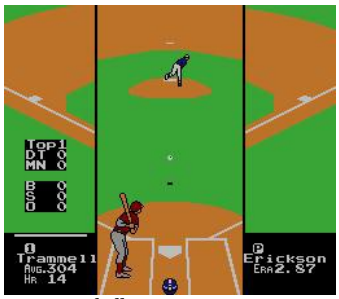
Dusty Diamond All-Star Softball, 1990

Little League Baseball, 1990

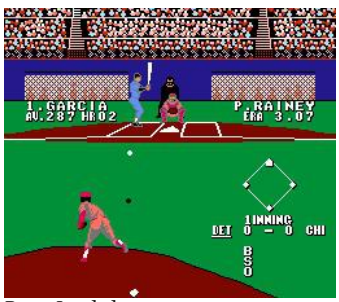

R.B.I. Baseball 2, 1990

Base Wars, 1991

Bo Jackson Baseball, 1991


R.B.I. Baseball 3, 1991

Roger Clemens MVP Baseball, 1991


Bases Loaded 3, 1991

Baseball Stars II, 1992

Legends of the Diamond, 1992

Bases Loaded 4, 1992

SUPER NES VS. SEGA GENESIS

BY SCOTT MARRIOTT

In an industry where originality is at a premium, it is not surprising to see the same games appearing on as many platforms the market will support. After all, companies need to be profitable and not every console system has the user base to justify spending the added time and expense associated with retooling an already existing game. So it is surprising when two versions of a game — released by the same publisher — end up being different.

Though cross-platform releases have been a part of the console industry since third-party publishers like Activision, Parker Brothers, and Imagic welcomed the Atari VCS' competition with open arms, the trend became increasingly popular during the 16-bit era, where the two titans of the time, Sega and Nintendo, battled neck and neck for the ultimate in bragging rights: the number-one selling console in the United States.

If history is any indication, there are two types of multiplatform releases. The overwhelming majority are near-identical titles offering slight improvements on the more technologically advanced system, which in the case of Sega versus Nintendo, typically meant the game enjoyed more colorful graphics and more pleasing sound on Super NES. Thus, by and large, most players would want the Nintendo version of the same game.

Yet there are also those titles that cater to a specific platform, with the developers changing key design features to accommodate a perceived difference in audiences or to simply play up a system's strengths. The latter approach is obviously of most interest to classic gamers, since it means there is potentially a better title out there worth experiencing.

The two main competing systems at the time (the third, NEC's TurboGrafx-16, simply didn't have the third-party support to draw suitable comparisons) also presented unique challenges to developers. The Super NES, in the hands of inexperienced programmers, could suffer from bouts of slowdown, earning the system the derogatory nickname of "sneeze" for its comparatively slower processor.

The Genesis had more problems. Though it had a faster processor, it was handicapped with a limited color palette, a lack of whiz-bang features like hardware scaling, and an inferior sound chip. Another very real issue publishers had to face was the cost difference in manufacturing cartridges, with Nintendo asking for a bigger cut of royalty fees. This, coupled with the company's longstanding tradition of "decency," often led to some interesting decisions and/or changes.

So without further ado, Classic Gamer Magazine presents ten games that offer different experiences depending on which system they appeared. Some are slight, some are substantial, and some are just silly. Of course, this list is far from comprehensive. Also keep in mind that these are games released by the same publisher, so same title/different games like *Jurassic Park*, *Disney's Aladdin*, and *Shadowrun* were not considered for comparison.

SHAQ-FU

1994, Electronic Arts

While most would consider the winner of this match-up the lesser of two evils, there are nonetheless differences worth mentioning between the two cartridges. The packaging is different, with the Genesis cover featuring an unintentionally hilarious image of Shaq with his teeth clenched and his outstretched hand in some sort of death grip (the Super NES went for a more solemn look from the basketball star, and a more subdued death grip). The Genesis cart also weighs in at a Shaqtastic 24-megabits (eight more than the Nintendo game), offering five more characters and five additional environments. The first fighting game from the French developers of *Flashback* and *Out of this World* was also bundled with a CD sampler of *Shaq-Fu: Da Return*, but only in the Genesis version.

MORTAL KOMBAT

1993, Arena/Acclaim Entertainment

The "Mortal Monday" release of *Mortal Kombat* (September 13, 1993) was a pivotal one for Nintendo fans, as it showed a changing attitude in games that could no longer be ignored. Though the Super NES version has the edge in terms of visuals and sound, including more voice samples, the drastic edits to the finishing moves and absence of a blood code found in the Genesis game would irritate enough potential consumers that it helped changed Nintendo's longstanding policy against violence. No amount of sweat droplets could disguise the fact that playing *Mortal Kombat* on the Super NES was like watching *Pulp Fiction* or *Scarface* on network television — what's the point? After Acclaim's sales figures showed more people purchasing the Genesis

version, Nintendo refused to make the same mistake twice, relaxing its stance on violence — at least for third-party publishers — with the release of *Mortal Kombat II*.

EARTHWORM JIM

1993, Arena/Acclaim Entertainment

One of the most critically acclaimed games of its time, *Earthworm Jim* stars an average worm who happens upon a super-powered space suit and uses it to exact his revenge on those responsible for killing his dirt-dwelling family. There are even more offbeat things to see and do in the Genesis version, however, with an entirely new level that finds the hero using his head as a propeller to negotiate a treacherous path of gurgling intestines (Intestinal Distress). While the Super NES version has a few extra visual effects, the control, music, and sound lack the punch of the Genesis game, which was more a testament to great programming than any advantage in hardware. Things would even out in the sequel, but this first battle has the Genesis version wiggling out in front.

THE PIRATES OF DARK WATER

1994, Sunsoft

The most unusual release on this list, since both versions are completely different. The Super NES game is a standard beat-'em-up reminiscent of *Final Fight*, *Rival Turf* and others in the kick-and-punch genre. The Genesis version, however, offers a mix of platforming, puzzles, light role-playing elements, and fast sword-swinging action. While both games feature the same three characters (Ren, Tula, and Ioz) from the comic book and Hanna-Barbera animated series, the 16-megabit Sega game is a solo-affair only, with the ability to swap out characters at the beginning of each new stage. Iguana Entertainment, the team behind *Aero the Acrobat*, developed the Genesis game, while Sunsoft handled the 8-megabit Super NES game.

TECMO SUPER BOWL

1993, Tecmo

The 16-bit upgrades to the NES blockbuster hit were both equally underwhelming in terms of presentation, though the Super NES version features some minor Mode-7 effects and team names in the endzones, which were inexplicably absent from the Sega title. Since neither pushes the system to its limits, it's puzzling why there are even differences at all.

PRIMAL RAGE

1995, Time Warner Interactive

Primal Rage for Super NES lacks the finishing moves, the kibbles and bits after tearing into a foe, and the ability to munch on the locals. The Genesis game retains the controversial finishing moves, including giant ape Chaos tinkling on his defeated foe, which kicked off a storm of controversy that eventually involved a Senator Joseph Lieberman rant and retailers like Toys "R" Us pulling it from store shelves.

SAMURAI SHODOWN

1994, Takara

A port of the hit SNK arcade and Neo Geo game, both versions offer two different "parts" of the arcade experience. Since neither console could adequately deliver the zooming action of the original, the developers used two different approaches: the 32-megabit Super NES version stays zoomed out, maintaining a fixed perspective with smaller characters. Blood sprays are intact, but some of the arcade original's cut-scene dialogue has changed and most of the voices have been left on the cutting room floor. New features include a countdown mode and Dolby Surround support. The Genesis cart, on the other hand, features a zoomed-in perspective but could not handle the massive fighter Earthquake, who was omitted. Background

animation and original dialogue were also casualties in the Sega translation, and the music is at its best when muted.

ROBOCOP VS. TERMINATOR

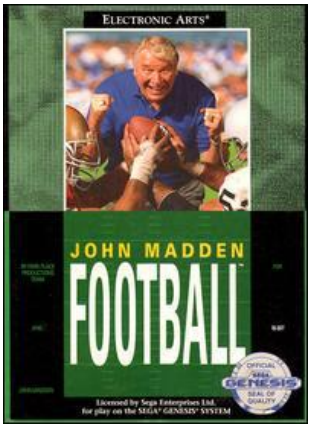
1993, Virgin

What was a violent, extremely bloody shooter on the Genesis became a clunky mess on Super NES. The character sprites look swollen in the Nintendo cart, and the sound effects and music are not nearly as engaging as Tommy Tallarico's soundtrack in the Sega game. The women removed from the Genesis game, likely because it was too controversial to shoot female characters into a bloody mess, made it to the Super NES game unscathed. The most notable feature of the Nintendo version is perhaps the black molded plastic box.

JOHN MADDEN FOOTBALL

1991/92, Electronic Arts

While Electronic Arts would eventually go on to do great things on Super NES (such as the exciting *NBA Live* series), the company's early sports efforts were downright abysmal compared to the tight, fast-paced Genesis games. Though released a year later than its Genesis counterpart, and despite featuring an additional 12 teams, the Nintendo game is the definition of choppy and sluggish, which must have made many a Super NES owner wonder —BOOM — what the fuss was with *John Madden*.



TMNT: TOURAMENT FIGHTERS

1994, Konami

Konami could do no wrong on the Super NES, but the Genesis was another story. Though original games like *Rocket Knight Adventures* and *Castlevania: Bloodlines* helped put a smile on many a Sega fan's face, inferior ports like *Sunset Riders* would elicit tears. *Tournament Fighters* belongs in the latter category. Konami released three different versions (NES, Genesis, and Super NES), but only the Super NES game is worth your time and trouble. The Genesis cartridge, which features a different storyline and setting (Dimension X), has scratchy sound, two less characters, cheap AI, and shockingly basic two-button controls. In this case, there is little doubt as to which

Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles came from the sewers.

Read previous issues of Classic Gamer Magazine @ classicgamer.com

BRINGING THE PAST BACK TO LIFE

By Jason Buchanan

For many video game lovers, the closest they'll come to owning their own bona fide home arcade is a large-screen television fed by their choice of home console systems.

For Rodney Minch, however, it began by collecting and repairing classic arcade machines. Fueled by childhood memories of feeding quarters to the digital monoliths on weekend trips to the local arcade, Minch has acquired over twenty classic machines since making the leap from video game junkie to serious collector. His dream became a reality right around the time he moved into his first house: "There just wasn't enough space in the apartment," says Minch.

It was after acquiring a *Bad Dudes* machine from a friend that Minch first tasted the joy of owning his own full-sized, coin-operated arcade machine, and though the monitor board needed some repair, the prospect of pounding baddies in the comfort of his own home was all the incentive needed to push the self-taught repairman into hitting the books and learning the skills needed to bring the machine back to life.

The fact that Minch had been into computers since about the age of ten certainly didn't hurt in learning the ins and outs of the machines, and with the aid of monitor documentation and internet FAQs, Minch was soon a master in the art of analog resuscitation.

The machines he owns are mainly of the 1980s variety, driven by fairly simple hardware and basic transistor logic. Since then he has acquired a variety of machines, some simply for the enjoyment of repairing and selling, and others intended specifically for the purpose of expanding his rapidly growing private collection -- which currently stands at 23 cabinets, including a *Pinbot* machine. As for how he goes about finding the increasingly rare but sometimes highly sought-after machines, Minch mainly relies on the local Bargain Corner and arcade auctions to see what's out there.

When he began keeping tabs on the arcade machine market in the early 1990s, there was a wealth of quality games available to the prospective buyer, a trend that only continued to grow as the internet and eBay in particular made access to and advertising of the machines more available to the casual collector. Though the amount a machine can fetch depends mainly on its working condition, the fact that Minch has grown quite accustomed to repairing machines has made the variety of potential purchases more open and the price range more accessible as well.

Though he claims that acquiring games at arcade auctions is roughly the equivalent of purchasing an automobile from a used car salesman, Minch notes

buyers with good negotiating skills may find that starting a collection isn't as expensive as one might suspect. Though those skills certainly can't hurt, it's mainly a matter of being in the right place at the right time. Like the time when Minch called a seller who was advertising six

games in the Bargain Corner. Minutes after Minch's call, a second potential buyer phoned in for directions to pick up the games. The seller incorrectly assumed it was Minch calling back.

When Minch called to confirm that he could transport the machines, the confused seller informed him that he had given the second caller directions and Minch now had a race on his hands. Though Minch won that particular race, he didn't get away as cleanly as he hoped after stopping at a nearby gas station to fuel up for the ride home: "I was standing at the pump filling my tank when this truck pulled into the gas station and a guy got out and walked over to my trailer and began looking at the machines. I asked him, 'Can I help you with anything?' and the man inquired as to if these were the machines that he himself was currently en route to purchasing." When Minch confirmed that they were, the second place driver made no attempts to hide his frustration. "He was pretty pissed off," said Minch with a small, sympathetic chuckle that suggested he knows what it's like to be on the losing end of that particular race.

As for his "holy grail" purchase, Minch is lucky to own one of the games he has always wanted most: Atari's *Quantum*, rumored to be one of the rarest games currently in circulation. Minch notes that vector-based games are some of the most difficult to repair as a result of their fairly sophisticated technology, though with a little time and the purchase of some parts, boards, and monitors, he soon had the game in working order. Rumor has it that although Atari produced 1,000 *Quantum* coin-op machines, the boat carrying 500 of them to Japan sunk while crossing the Atlantic -- making it one of the most sought-after games regardless of the fact that *Quantum* never really clicked with gamers.

How was Minch able to secure such a rare find? Word of mouth: Minch came across *Quantum* when a friend informed him of a guy who was preparing to demolish a nearby warehouse that had some machines gathering dust. Though Minch generally collects more for actual gameplay than for the rarity of a machine, the prospect of repairing and owning a *Quantum* coin-op proved too much to resist. Another fairly rare game that Minch owns is *Reactor*, a purchase he made from an advertiser in the Bargain Corner who had the machine sitting dormant in a basement.
Other games that Minch currently owns and cites as his favorites include *Asteroids Deluxe*, *Centipede*, and his four-player *Warlords* cocktail table, with such fan favorites as *Star Wars*, *Battlezone*, and *Road Blasters* making for one hell of a retro gaming party when Minch opens up his house to friends. At a recent housewarming party, Minch's friends crowded into his basement mesmerized by the glowing screens as they went head to head in a variety of *Pac-Man* variants (Minch has the gameboard modified to include numerous incarnations of the popular yellow pellet muncher), practiced their sharpshooting in *Rolling Thunder*, and experienced the dirt tossing fun of *Dig Dug* or the double-fisted joystick bliss of *Black Widow*.

As for those looking to start their own personal arcade, Minch recommends starting on the internet, with the Killer List of Video Games (www.klov.com) offering a comprehensive inventory on all known arcade machines as well as manuals and schematics for the technically inclined buyer. Newsgroups also served as a great resource according to Minch, with RGVAC (rec.games.video.arcade.collecting) keeping the arcade-collecting community connected and offering an ideal means to exchange tips and information with fellow collectors.

PAC-MAN IS HERE!

This hungry little fellow dashes around a maze, gobbling up dots, power pills and ghosts—for points. PAC-MAN is a real treat for the whole family! There are eight games, including special versions for young children.

ATARI®

VIDEO COMPUTER SYSTEM™

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IT'S WAR! CLASSICS VS. REMAKES

BY BRETT WEISS

In Classic Gamer Magazine Vol. 1, Issue #6, five classic games were compared to their modern day, upgraded remakes. The classics won in decisive fashion, 4 to 1. The only remake in the list that bested its progenitor was the PlayStation version of *Q*bert*, which takes the basic concept of the arcade original and expands it admirably without sacrificing a lick in terms of gameplay or fun factor. We now offer five more classic vs. remake comparisons to determine if the old favorites can be outmatched through new technology.

ROBOTRON: 2084 (ATARI 5200) VS. ROBOTRON X (PLAYSTATION)

While the Atari 5200 is often derided for its loosey-goosey, non-centering joysticks, the system offered up an incredibly faithful reproduction of *Robotron: 2084*, one of the best and most intense shooters from the early '80s. Included in the package was a special dual controller holder that allowed gamers to recreate the twin joystick control of the arcade original. *Robotron X* does not offer any special control techniques (unless you happen to think a control pad is special), but it is a decent (though less harrowing) little game. Instead of viewing the action from above, this version puts you 3D-style on the floor of each room. This setup works relatively well and adds a new spin on a favorite classic.

Classic: A+ Modern: C+

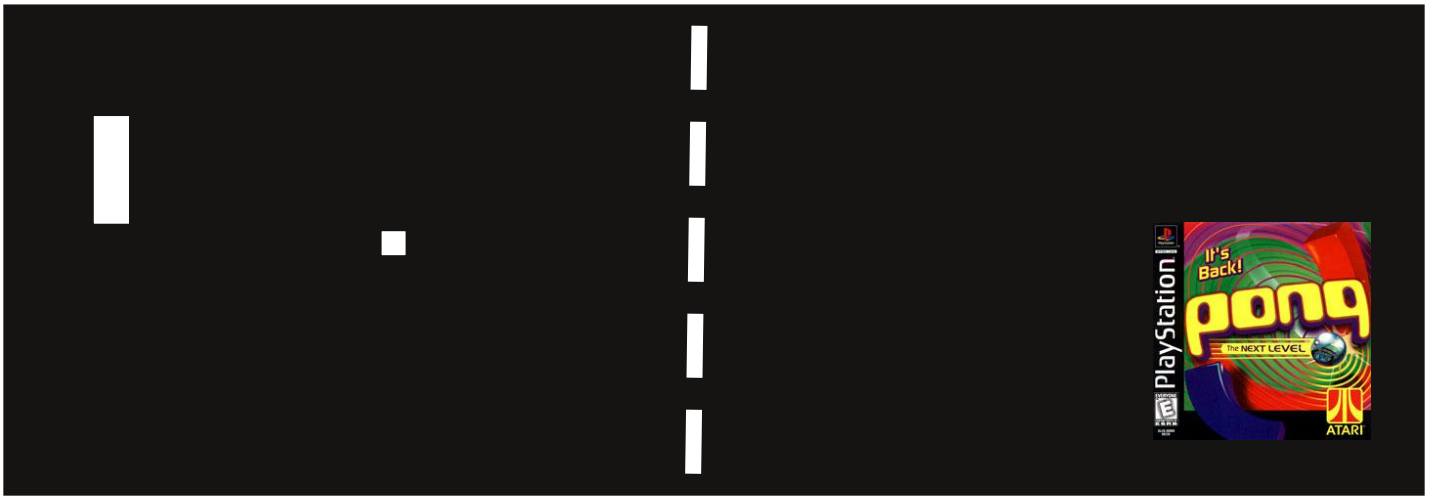
VIDEO OLYMPICS (ATARI 2600) VS. PONG: THE NEXT LEVEL (PLAYSTATION)

Video Olympics offers 50 different variations on *Pong*, the first commercially successful arcade game. With its simplistic graphics and basic gameplay, *Video Olympics* may not seem like much at first glance, but it offers absorbing two-player action that is infinitely replayable, especially since the game utilizes the Atari 2600's invaluable rotary paddle controllers. With its lack of rotary controls, *Pong: The Next Level* can be frustrating at times, but it is still a worthwhile game. The power-ups, multiple environments, 3D graphics, and other enhancements make *Pong* relevant for jaded modern audiences without corrupting or overly complicating gameplay.

Classic: A Modern: B+

BREAKOUT (ATARI 2600) VS. BREAKOUT (PLAYSTATION)

As with *Video Olympics*, *Breakout* makes excellent use of the Atari 2600 paddle controllers. Though not as good as its sequel, *Super Breakout*, *Breakout* for the 2600 is a finely tuned, faithfully reproduced conversion of an arcade classic. The PlayStation rendition adds personality, humor, adventure, and the obligatory power-ups to the *Breakout* universe while keeping the basic idea of batting a ball to remove bricks (and other objects in this version) from the playfield. Unfortunately, control can be



frustrating, and the original game is not included as part of the package. The last level is similar to classic *Breakout*, but it is only one (non-repeating) screen.
Classic: B Modern: C

SPACE INVADERS (ARCADE) VS. SPACE INVADERS (PLAYSTATION)

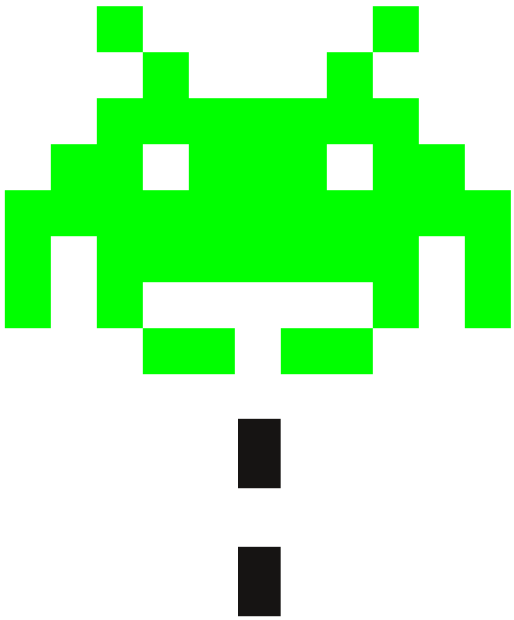
Though not as bad as *Galaga: Destination EARTH*, *Space Invaders* for the PlayStation is pretty darn pathetic. The power-ups, additional weaponry, and lackluster foes combine to make the game much too easy. Even the bosses and bonus rounds are incredibly easy to beat. A competent rendition of the superior original game is included, but won't replace outstanding versions of *Space Invaders* on Game Boy and Super NES. The arcade version of *Space Invaders* may have grown slightly stale over the years, but it's still an entertaining challenge.
Classic: B+ Modern: D

ASTEROIDS (ARCADE) VS. ASTEROIDS (PC)

In *Asteroids* for the PC, the starkly beautiful black-and-white vector graphics of the original game have been replaced with stunning outer space vistas rivaling those seen in a *Star Trek* movie. The basic rotating, thrusting, and rock-destroying action remain intact, and the keyboard controls work great. New weapons, ships, and enemies have been added, as well as an engaging two-player simultaneous mode. While *Asteroids* is one of the more effective updated remakes, the original game is still more addictive and more enjoyable. Luckily, a good version of the classic game is included in the package.
Classic: A+ Modern: B

And there you have it, folks: Classic gaming stomps the more technically advanced, ultimately less playable, modern renditions of said classics by a hefty margin. The overwhelming victory of classics in this list does not necessarily prove that retrogaming is better than modern gaming, but it does help illustrate is that remakes are rarely better than the original games on which they are based (a principle that applies to movies as well). Whether older, skill-based "twitch" games are inherently better than newer, feature-heavy games of exploration is a debate for another time. Yet despite mixed reviews regarding updated remakes, game companies should continue churning them out since they can often be interesting and sometimes even enjoyable.

Brett Weiss is the author of Classic Home Video Games, 1972-1984 (McFarland, 2007) and Classic Home Video Games, 1985-1988 (McFarland, 2009). To catch up with Brett, check out his blog: brettweisswords.blogspot.com.



Five Atari 2600 Games Worse Than E.T.

By Mark Androvich

It is a common belief that *E.T.* for the Atari 2600 is "the worst game ever!" -- a notion repeated ad nauseum on internet forums -- yet this couldn't be further from the truth.

The following five games are closer to the bottom of the Atari 2600 barrel, and they certainly aren't alone. In fact, it was difficult just to narrow the list down to five selections.

Between 1982 and 1983, dozens of companies attempted to cash in on the video game craze that was making Activision and Atari wealthy. The problem is that most of them lacked talented programmers that were able to make the Atari 2600 shine, resulting in games that weren't able to compete with the likes of *Pitfall!* and *Demon Attack*.

Had Atari been able to control the chip supply and require licenses of game publishers, as Nintendo later did, perhaps the majority of these games would not have been released.

The expensive and slow process of manufacturing cartridges meant that companies weren't able to respond to the market (or lack of it) for their sub-par games. Overestimating demand, companies were stuck with unsold inventory that they quickly dumped. The glut of titles caused full-price sales to drop as consumers (mostly parents) faced the decision of purchasing similar-looking game boxes: one with a $39.99 price tag and one with a $9.99 price tag.

These factors led to the market crash, which can't be blamed on any one particular game -- and certainly not on *E.T.* Still not convinced?

Track down the following titles...

Sneak n' Peek

One of the defining characteristics of video games is their ability to put players in situations they would never face in real life -- hitting a home run in the bottom of the ninth to win the World Series, exploring ancient ruins, teeing off against Tiger Woods, and saving the world by defusing a nuclear bomb, to give some examples.

Of course, some video games put players in situations they could easily experience in real life -- poker, bowling and tennis, for example -- but even so, there are situations where playing virtual versions of those games might be justified. Perhaps it is raining outside, or perhaps you lack the necessary equipment. However, there isn't one single good reason for playing a video game version of "hide and seek."

The majority of the game variations in *Sneak n' Peek* require a second player, thus eliminating the only plausible excuse (having no friends) for playing the game in the first place. And since the hiding takes place on-screen, the person who is "it" has to cover his eyes while the other person hides. Can you really trust them not to look? To make matters more interesting, some of the hiding places defy the laws of physics. Hiding in a closet or behind a couch makes sense, but in the middle of a floor or under the house itself?

Just in case you weren't scared off by the mundane premise or the florescent blue-and-purple graphics, the programmers added a soundtrack of atonal nursery rhyme favorites.

Star Fox

There is an old adage that says "you get what you pay for." This is especially true with Atari 2600 games. When Mythicon came out with their line of $9.99 cartridges, at a time when new games sold for three or four times that amount, it was easy to be skeptical. Yet even meager expectations were unfulfilled by the final product.

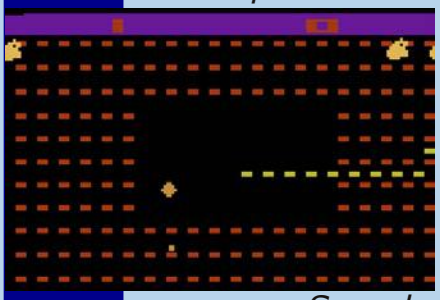
Star Fox is a generic side-scrolling shooter in the same vein as *Defender* and *Chopper Command*, except without an interesting premise or serviceable graphics. In fact, without adequate scenery/landmarks, it is often difficult to determine your movements. An enemy fighter drone tracks your every movement, requiring you to maneuver around it and either shoot it or (on the lower difficulty) ram into it.

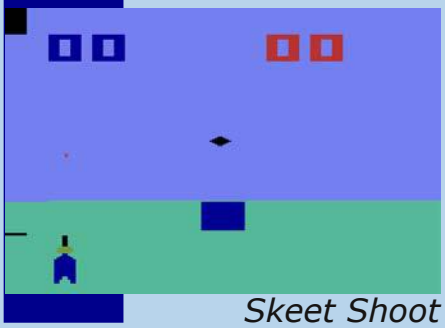
Two factors set *Star Fox* apart from mere mediocrity and lower it to the craptacular level. The first is the need to collect crystals that periodically appear on the surface below you. Due to touchy controls, which scroll the entire screen with the slightest movement, collecting crystals is about as easy as landing on a pinhead using a pogo stick. You'll find yourself constantly overshooting the crystals, and if you are fortunate enough to find yourself directly above one, the aforementioned enemy drone is there to destroy you. The second factor that makes *Star Fox* a game to

Sneak n' Peak

Star Fox

Swordquest Series


Sssnake


Skeet Shoot

avoid is a constant buzzing noise, as if the programmer POKE'd a test value into the sound register and forgot to clear it, hoping that the rest of the game's meager sound effects would drown it out. They don't.

Swordquest Series

Yes, there are fans of this series, but they've deluded themselves into thinking they are playing actual games. Each entry in the *SwordQuest* series is no more a video game than a scratch-off lottery ticket.

Not that there is anything wrong with using a game for a contest or for promotional purposes, provided that the game itself is compelling. But there ought to be a reason to play the game after the contest is over. That's where Atari definitely dropped the ball on the *SwordQuest* series.

Through trial and error, players were required to find numerical clues by placing items in rooms with a vague theme. However, it was also possible to find the clues and submit a valid entry just by reading the comic book enclosed with the game. As the proper location of items followed neither rhyme nor reason, critical thinking or puzzle-solving skills were not required. Crosswords, Sudoku, and even *Brain Games* require more use of one's gray matter.

The handful of game sequences are so brief and inconsequential that mini-games seem like RPGs by comparison. Finally, even if you were persuaded to purchase what was essentially a sweepstakes entry, you weren't able to finish the story: Atari never released all four games in the series. To the eventual winners of the $25,000 gold-encrusted talisman and chalice, $39.99 might have been a small price to pay. For the rest of us, it was a colossal rip-off.

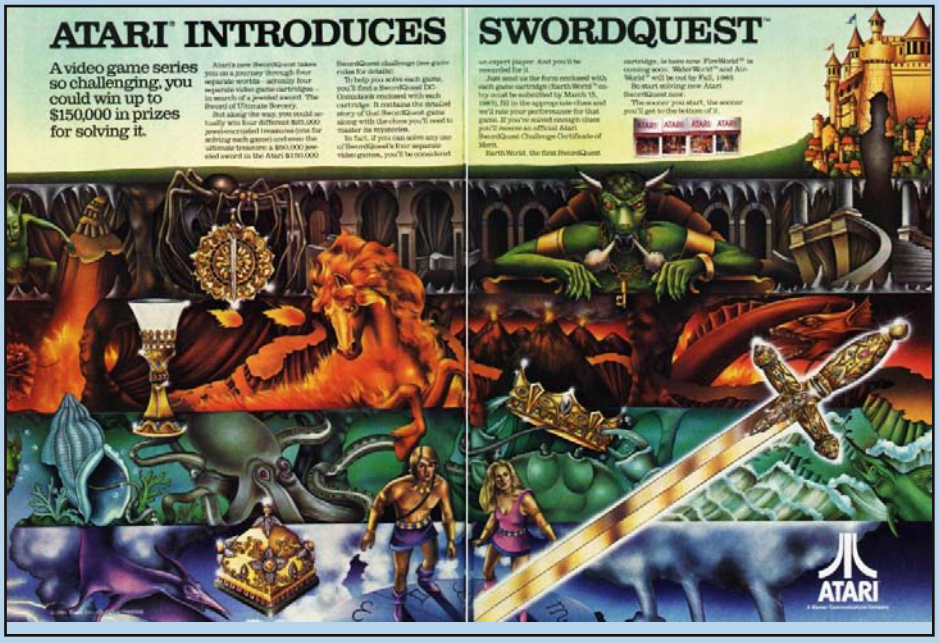
Sssnake

With an edgy name -- note the extra two letters -- and a label showing a guy battling a giant snake wrapped around what looks like playground equipment floating in outer space, how could this game go wrong?

For starters, the title and concept seem to have little to do with the actual gameplay, which involves shooting enemies from inside a small playing field in the center of the screen. Unfortunately, your shots can only travel through small openings between dozens of red squares surrounding you. The enemies, however, slither right through these barriers.

Although your cannon can shoot in all four cardinal directions, you cannot quickly change position. If you are facing south and a new enemy appears at the top of the screen, you can't just turn around. Instead, you must head into one of the lower corners of the playing field and move upwards. Only when you reach the top can you slide left and right, firing towards the top of the screen. Of course, by that time, the enemy has overtaken you.

Imagine *Centipede* with mushrooms that are impervious to damage. Now confine the shooter to the outside edges of a 5" x 5" square in the center of the screen, and then require players to hit the exact corners of the square to change direction. Oh yeah ... remove the spider, eliminate the interesting sound effects,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A video game series so challenging, you could win up to $150,000 in prizes for solving it.
ATARI

simplify the graphics, and use a joystick instead of a trackball. That's *Sssnake* in a nutshell.

Skeet Shoot

Games by Apollo released a couple of decent games before going bankrupt, but you never would have guessed that anyone at the company knew how to program the Atari 2600 judging by their debut game. The basic concept, lining up a gun with a target and pushing a button to fire, had been done many times before. Atari's own *Air Sea Battle* cartridge, released five years earlier, featured something similar as one its 27 game variations, and Epyx's *Summer Games* featured a skeet shooting game as just one of seven different events.

Take away these additional game variations, lose the colorful graphics, and make the controls slightly less responsive, and you're left with *Skeet Shoot*. Is it playable? Yes. But considering what Activision was doing in 1982, the game was definitely a step in the wrong direction. Today, we might refer to it as a "tech demo."

Podcast review:

RetroGaming Roundup

By Chris Cavanaugh

Classic gaming podcasts are becoming as common as *Combat* cartridges, so finding a quality one can become an exasperating experience. Too often the hosts forget to make the show about the games and focus too much on themselves. Fortunately, the guys at RetroGaming Roundup (Mike Kennedy, Mike James, and Scott Schreiber) are able to deliver their impressive gaming knowledge in a way that never speaks down to their audience.

RetroGaming Roundup's podcasts cover a multitude of subjects and span an impressive and entertaining five-plus hours. The highlight is the "Roundtable" session, where the trio hashes out the best games for a particular platform and compiles them into a "best of" list. The real enjoyment is actually not in the final product, but hearing how the sausage is made. This segment showcases the chemistry among the hosts. Good-natured insults and brutally honest opinions are slung at the expense of some of the questionable choices, while passionate defenses are volleyed in return, often leading to comical exchanges.

Mike James' "The British Hour" is spent giving Yanks a view of what's happening with video games past and present on the other side of The Pond. UK Mike is funny and likable, and he does a great job covering a gaming culture that so few stateside collectors know about.

For the technical-oriented listeners, Scott Schreiber lends his expertise to such various topics as running a business placing arcade units in public spots, pinball and cabinet repair, and the lowdown on the recently released, consumer-friendly *Batman* pinball machine. Though some of the material is a bit specialized and won't be everyone's cup of tea, Scott does an admirable job keeping the information accessible without dumbing it down for his intended audience.

Other recent highlights include a history of pinball "banana" flippers, a dizzying amount of classic gaming news, recommended websites, and an amazing, must-listen "Tron Radio Show" that was thankfully saved from the dustbin of '80s history.

RetroGaming Roundup's archives go back to 2009, allowing you to hear the show evolve as technical glitches are smoothed over and the hosts became more comfortable. Don't let the length of the shows scare you off: tight producing and editing keeps the discussion flowing, while the various segments allow listening to be broken up over time. Even after listening to over five hours of classic gaming discussion, I couldn't wait to hear more from these passionate podcasters.

http://www.retrogamingroundup.com

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Revenge of the Birds

by Chris Cavanaugh

***Angry Birds* has soared through the list of killer app titles for the iPhone and iPod touch, and it's not hard to see why.**

This highly accessible title has players seeking revenge on a herd of green pigs that have stolen a collection of bird eggs. Reprisal comes in the form of slingshotting the slighted birds into fortresses sheltering the guilty swine. Physics come into play as players use the touch screen to control both the speed and angle in which each bird is flung.

Early levels are simple enough and work more as a tutorial for the highly responsive controls, but later levels become real melon-scratchers. Players are given a preset amount of birds that must be used wisely. Basic red birds give way to more complex types, such as blue ones that split into three birds, yellow ones that accelerate at your command, and birds that explode on contact. Different building materials also react to each bird in different ways.

The beauty in the gameplay is that there is more than one way to skin a pig, as players can topple structures using varied strategies. A red bird brings down lumber but won't penetrate concrete, whereas the tri-splitting blue bird provides the best chain reaction. Figuring out which building material to hit first and at what angle is part of the fun. Points are awarded for damage caused to the fortress, any destroyed pigs, and each remaining bird. Players are then rated up to three stars based on the level's overall score.

If there is any downside to *Angry Birds*, it's that it sometimes can be too challenging. Some puzzles can take an hour (or more) to solve, but when they are finally complete, your sense of satisfaction is that much grander. Earning only one star on a level is simply an unmet challenge, and there are plenty of other incentives to keep you playing. There are achievements, leaderboards, golden eggs that unlock more levels, and free updates that include new levels. An amazing deal for its amount of replay value, *Angry Birds* will quickly find its way to the top of any app library's pecking order.

The Pacman Legacy

BY SCOTT MARRIOTT

If you had to name the first three significant arcade games in the industry -- and we're talking historically significant, not the game you first fell in love with -- the answer would have to be *Pong* (1972), *Space Invaders* (1978), and *Pac-Man* (1980). Each helped reinforce the commercial viability of electronic entertainment, growing the industry by leaps and bounds, or in *Pac-Man*'s case, dots and energizers.

Created by Japanese developer Toru Iwatani, who reportedly drew inspiration from a pizza with a missing piece, *Pac-Man* did something completely different with the medium. Instead of shooting targets in space, you guided a voracious yellow creature through a maze filled with consumables. Four monsters, later referred to as ghosts, added the thrill of pursuit and a sense of randomness to the action, even if it was illusion. *Pac-Man* was colorful, simple to grasp, hard to master, and was appealing to women and men alike.

Much like *Space Invaders*' impact in Japan, *Pac-Man* was a bona fide blockbuster in the United States, spawning an assortment of marketing deals and licensed products that would celebrate the character in song, cereal and shirts. Yet developer Namco had difficulty trying to build on *Pac-Man*'s success through sequels. *Ms. Pac-Man* was easily the most popular, enhancing the game in nearly every area, but it wasn't technically developed by Namco and started as a bootleg.

Pac-Man Plus, *Super Pac-Man, Baby Pac-Man, Jr. Pac-Man*, and so forth, all added twists on the familiar play mechanics, some stranger than others, but failed to capture the universal appeal of the original. In the end, these failings didn't matter; *Pac-Man* had made such an indelible mark that the original game is still a best-seller 30 years after its debut. How else can you explain the Xbox Live Arcade version of *Pac-Man* outselling the downloadable service's *Ms. Pac-Man*? Perhaps the old adage is true, you never forget your first love.

It's no secret that early on, the console industry relied heavily on arcade translations to sell platforms. Everyone was looking to capture that arcade feeling, and while console technology was a step or two behind the latest and greatest in the coin-op world, it didn't necessarily deter sales. Namco could keep the *Pac-Man* franchise going on multiple fronts, licensing home conversions and eventually expanding the character to new genres. *Pac-Man* is still going strong today, still as recognizable, still as insatiable. Only now, it's for a new generation.

To commemorate the greedy gobbler's 30th anniversary, Classic Gamer Magazine takes a look at the various iterations of *Pac-Man* throughout the years. Some were inspired choices, some were dreadful, but we feel all are worth taking a waka-waka-walk down memory lane.

Ms Pacman 1981 Arcade

Key feature(s): Pac-Man has a love interest in this excellent, though familiar, sequel. Pac-Man's paramour addresses a few of the original game's limitations while retaining everything that made it a blockbuster. While the play mechanics and scoring are identical to the original, there are now four mazes, each represented by a different color, two additional warp tunnels, and new bonus items that bounce within the maze. The orange ghost known as "Clyde" has been ditched in favor of "Sue" for reasons unknown.

Release info: Arcade mod specialists General Computer Corporation created a *Pac-Man* clone called "Crazy Otto" and sold it to Bally/Midway, whose developers changed the artwork and sprites to create an unofficial *Pac-Man* sequel. Fearing legal repercussions, Bally/Midway turned over the rights to Namco and distributed the title in the States. *Ms. Pac-Man* was a runaway hit, but Bally/Midway could not duplicate its success despite persistent attempts at unauthorized sequels and spinoffs. Eventually Namco revoked Bally/Midway's license.

Pacman Plus 1982 Arcade

Key feature(s): American licensee Bally/Midway released a number of unofficial *Pac-Man* titles apart from Japanese developer Namco, with the biggest being 1981's *Ms. Pac-Man*. To combat unauthorized U.S. hacks of the original *Pac-Man*, Bally/Midway decided to create a legal coin-op update called *Pac-Man Plus*.

The developers mixed things up a bit by speeding up the action and introducing trippy new effects after consuming one of the teal-colored maze's four power pellets. Ghosts, dots, or even the maze itself can disappear from view, or three ghosts may turn blue instead of all four. The snacks themselves, ranging from peas to pancakes, also function like power-ups instead of score bonuses.

What went wrong? Unlike Namco's *Super Pac-Man*, *Pac-Man Plus* keeps most of the original's signature features intact. The problem is that once you've played *Ms. Pac-Man*, it's hard to go back to playing on just one maze, and the random power-ups in this version are more annoying than fun. These features were clearly designed to keep players from mastering the game, or following specific patterns, so the quarters would keep flowing. Yet the approach backfired, with players shunning this version in favor of the familiar *Pac-Man* and *Ms. Pac-Man*.

Ms Pacman

Pacman Plus

SUPER PACMAN 1982 ARCADE

Key feature(s): Pac-Man is a superhero? Despite donning a red cape on the cabinet art and marquee, this Pac-Man doesn't soar through the air, shoot beams out of his eyes, or capture criminals. He basically gets fat. The "super" in *Super Pac-Man* refers to his super size, not super powers. Namco's "official" sequel to *Pac-Man* finds the golden gobbler collecting keys to unlock gates leading to fruit and other consumables. The maze format returns, along with the four ghosts, but there are no dots. Eating an energizer causes Pac-Man to dramatically increase in size, granting him the power to eat his rivals and smash his way through any remaining locked gates.

What went wrong? While *Super Pac-Man* is an interesting twist on the series, the gameplay looks complicated at first glance, which perhaps is why it failed to take flight among arcade goers. The developers took a creative risk by altering a winning formula, adding some layers of strategy to the maze-based action at the expense of the original's singular-goal simplicity.

PAC AND PAL 1983 ARCADE JAPAN

Key feature(s): Building on *Super Pac-Man*'s unusual take on the maze format, Namco's *Pac & Pal* has you doing even more head-scratching things while controlling the pie-shaped protagonist. Pac-Man is still avoiding ghosts in a maze-type environment, but instead of munching dots, he's flipping cards of all things. The gate system from *Super Pac-Man* returns, albeit with fewer consumables. The handful of fruits and items in the maze must first be unlocked by eating the corresponding playing cards.

Pac's "pal," a lime-colored lass named Miru, is not very friendly. She wanders through the maze and will grab anything inside an open gate if you don't snatch it up beforehand. Yet the weirdest aspect of the game is that Pac-Man no longer consumes ghosts. Instead, he stuns them by turning blue and belching out different attacks, from sound waves to ice cubes.

Release info: *Pac & Pal* was exclusively released in Japan, though a version called *Pac-Man & Chomp Chomp* was being prepped for a U.S. launch that never materialized. The key difference between the titles? Miru was replaced with Pac-Man's dog, Chomp Chomp, featured in Hanna-Barbera's animated series that aired from 1982 to 1984.

SUPER PACMAN PAC AND PAL

JR PACMAN 1983 ARCADE

Key feature(s): Hoping the answer to continued *Pac-Man* success involved additional family members, Bally/Midway creates a decidedly unhip youngster that wears a propeller beanie, likes tricycles, and is romantically interested in Blinky's daughter (!). Fortunately, Junior has the same voracious appetite for dots as Pac-Man and the missus.

The key change, other than the pint-sized protagonist, is the maze itself, which is now twice as wide and features a horizontal scrolling camera. There are seven maze layouts and six power pellets to consume instead of four. Bonus items like kites, tricycles, and root beer bounce their way across the maze, but they do more than add points to your score. They increase the size of the dots they come into contact with and function like energizers when consumed.

Say what? Junior's love interest in the little red ghost, named Yum-Yum, is more than a little strange. Mere contact with the girl should theoretically kill him, but if it didn't, it could lead to a union that would forever end the ongoing feud between the ghosts and Pac-people -- which is just bad for business.

BABY PACMAN 1983 ARCADE

Key feature(s): Easily the most striking of the *Pac-Man*-inspired arcade games, *Baby Pac-Man* combines video game and pinball in a single upright cabinet. The 13" display at the top of the cabinet has Baby Pac-Man gobbling up dots within a maze, but there are no energizers to eat. To turn the tables on the ghosts, Baby Pac must enter a table -- a pinball table -- by moving through a warp tunnel positioned at the bottom of the screen. Players then attempt to spell out various letters on the table for bonuses in the video game.

What went wrong? The small video monitor and drastically shortened pinball machine meant that fans of either format were going to be disappointed. Potential maintenance headaches had to make arcade owners skittish, and good luck convincing patrons to spend their precious quarters on an odd-looking machine with incongruent play styles.

JR PAC MAN

BABY PACMAN

PROFESSOR PACMAN 1983 ARCADE

Key feature(s): *Professor Pac-Man* is a quiz game (a quiz game?!) that has you earning fruit and snacks for each correct multiple-choice answer. There are only three responses, and the questions all involve studying a series of images (likely to make the game easier to convert to other countries). You'll stare at a group of three buildings, for example, then answer which has the most windows; or, you'll study a group of objects to determine which item doesn't belong.

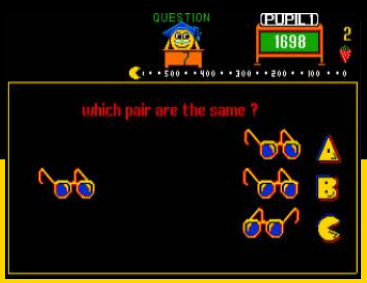
What went wrong? It's clear at this point that neither Namco nor Bally/Midway has a clue on how to build on the original *Pac-Man*'s success, so developers are taking shots in the dark, hoping something hits. This one failed miserably, producing an estimated 400 units. While *Professor Pac-Man* was unable to achieve a passing grade with arcade patrons, the educational angle makes this title one of the more interesting arcade offshoots.

PACLAND 1984 ARCADE

Key feature(s): A side-scrolling jumping game that preceded Nintendo's *Super Mario Bros.*, *Pac-Land* represents a dramatic change for Namco's mascot. No longer confined to a maze, Pac-Man is now a fully realized character that can run, jump, and wear a hat.

Your goal is to escort a friendly fairy across a series of eight "trips," each spanning multiple segments for a total of 19 levels, by running left to right and avoiding contact with numerous hazards. The ghosts all make a return, only this time they'll appear in comical modes of transportation.

What went wrong? Like so many of the later *Pac-Man* arcade games, *Pac-Land* has a number of peculiar design decisions. Despite its colorful, cartoon-style graphics, with elements taken from the Hanna-Barbera animated series, the game's controls are irritating. Movement is mapped to buttons instead of a joystick, and many jumps require a frustrating level of precision, while running at full speed, to pull off.



PROF PACMAN

PACLAND

PACMANIA 1987 ARCADE

Key Feature(s): Taking a cue from Sega's *Zaxxon*, *Pac-Mania* uses a flashy, isometric perspective for its four themed worlds. Three new ghosts have been added to the mix, and Pac-Man has a new jumping ability that lets him leap over his pesky pursuers in a single bound.

What went wrong? Pac-Man finally returns to his ravenous roots (re: munching on dots while avoiding ghosts), but the zoomed-in perspective means you can only see a portion of the maze at any given time. Instead of quickly scanning the entire maze for potential escape routes, you have to react immediately to your surroundings and hope for the best. The perspective is more a detriment to gameplay than an asset, especially when there are eight or nine ghosts chasing you.

PACMAN VR 1996 ARCADE

Key feature(s): After a nine-year hiatus in the arcades, *Pac-Man* returns as a virtual reality game. *Pac-Man VR* has you moving through a 3D maze from a first-person perspective, using a handheld controller and the goggle's head-tracking display to navigate your colorful surroundings. The game's maze features very short walls, letting you see a generous portion of the layout instead of limiting your viewpoint. Play mechanics are otherwise the same as the arcade original: guide Pac-Man through the maze to gobble up dots while avoiding four ghosts. While *Pac-Man VR* features timed play, you earn additional seconds by filling a horizontal "extra time" meter through eating dots and scoring points.

PAC N PARTY 2000 ARCADE

Key feature(s): Pac-Man is locked and loaded in this target shooting game, the third entry in Namco's "Shooting Medal" series, which involves aiming a bright orange pistol at various formations of ghosts. The more ghosts you shoot, the more tickets you'll earn to spend at the arcade's prize redemption center. Included are four main stages and four bonus stages. Collect five of the same fruits or spell the word "jackpot" to access bonus games.

PACMAN 25TH ANNIV 2005 ARCADE

Key feature(s): *Pac-Man 25th Anniversary* is a collection of three arcade blockbusters in one upright cabinet: *Pac-Man, Ms. Pac-Man, and Galaga*. The *Pac-Man* featured in this coin-op compilation can be played in its original 1980 form or a "speedier" version.

PACMAN BATTLE ROYALE 2010 ARCADE

Key feature(s): *Pac-Man: Battle Royale* shares more than a few similarities with the excellent *Pac-Man: Championship Edition*. The pulse-pounding music, rapidly changing mazes, and neon look are all borrowed from the digitally distributed game, only now the main emphasis is on four-player simultaneous action. Though there are dots to eat and ghosts to avoid, there is no score in *Battle Royale*, which is odd. The main objective is to quickly eat power pellets, which supersize the player's Pac-Man (as in *Super Pac-Man*), giving him free reign to gobble up the competition as well as any nearby ghosts. The first player to eliminate all three rivals earns a win, and play resumes until a set number of lives are exhausted.

PACMANIA

PACMAN VR

PAC N PARTY

Pacman Home Conversions

Atari 2600 1982

The Atari 2600 version's orange-and-blue maze, comprised of large dashes instead of small dots, is the most obvious change from the arcade original. White ghosts flicker in and out of view, and the fruit has been replaced by a rectangular "vitamin." From the protagonist's blocky appearance to a chomping sound that's reminiscent of a thick rubber band being plucked, this isn't a *Pac-Man* you'll soon forget. It's hard to pin down what's the most troubling aspect of the game: the garish look, the irritating audio, or the loose controls. The eight included variants all influence the speed of Pac-Man and the ghosts rather than add new ways to play. While the strength of the *Pac-Man* license made it the best-selling cartridge on the console, the final numbers fell well below Atari's projections.

Atari 5200 1982

Considering the time of its release, the Atari 5200 version of *Pac-Man* is an excellent conversion of the arcade game, with relatively close sound effects, intermission sequences, and color ghosts (though their eyes are black and Inky is green instead of light blue). The maze has the same layout as in the arcade, but with more horizontal space and a reduced vertical height, resulting in 16 additional dots to eat over the original's 240. It is also a bit more challenging than the coin-op game, primarily due to a faster starting speed. Yet the biggest part of the challenge is taming the loose controller, which can't handle the quick, precise movements required at higher levels. *Note: The Atari 8-bit computer versions of Pac-Man are identical to the 5200 version.*

Intellivision 1983

Though not as visually impressive as the 5200 version, *Pac-Man* on Intellivision is a solid port of the dot-munching original, with bright, colorful graphics, intermission sequences, and the same ghost-dodging gameplay you know and love. Easily the most noticeable change is the maze's smaller size and revised layout (only 115 dots compared to the arcade's 240). Like the Atari 5200 version, the four ghosts have black eyes and Inky is the wrong shade. In addition, the score is displayed on the right margin instead of above the maze. The controls are surprisingly responsive, though *Pac-Man* pros will find the challenge lacking.

2600

5200

INTV

Apple II 1983

Originally programmed in 1983 by H.A.L. Labs under the name "*Taxman*," AtariSoft's *Pac-Man* on Apple II is notable for featuring an exact layout of the arcade version's maze with the correct number of dots. Still, there are some big differences. After winning *Taxman*'s code in court, Atari forgot to change a few things. Pac-Man and the ghosts are the wrong colors, the bonus fruit is the size of a Buick, and sound effects are almost non-existent (a ticking sound occurs after Pac-Man gobbles a dot). The current and high scores are also positioned to the left of the maze. This version is distinctive for being the only *Pac-Man* port to support up to five alternating players (another feature remaining from *Taxman*).

Commodore 64 1983

Pac-Man for the Commodore 64 looks and plays a lot like the Atari 5200 version, albeit with better controls. The maze is the same, with a total of 256 dots to eat instead of the arcade original's 240, due to the slight increase in the maze's width. You can select the difficulty before play and alternate turns with a second player.

IBM PC 1983

Pac-Man on PC is visually a step up from the Atari 5200 version, if only for the ghosts' animated eyes, but the colors are off and there are 232 dots to eat instead of 240. The sound effects aren't particularly pleasing, either.

TI 99 4A 1983

AtariSoft's *Pac-Man* for the TI 99/4A is even more impressive looking than the Atari 5200 game, as this version has the correct ghost colors as well as their white, animated eyes. The maze layout is the same as the arcade version, though like the 5200 game, the expanded horizontal area results in a few extra dots to chomp on. The only glaring issue, from a presentation standpoint, is the lack of intermission screens. Unfortunately, the gameplay can't quite measure up to the quality of the visuals, as movement is sluggish and the pacing feels off. Strange but true: the back of the box refers to the ghosts as "goblins."

VIC 20 1983

The VIC-20 version of *Pac-Man* features bold colors, but the maze is smaller (132 dots) and doesn't appear in its correct aspect ratio. The ghosts, Pac-Man, and bonus fruit are huge in relation to the maze's size, so this is not the version to play if you are claustrophobic.

NES 1987 1993

Originally released in Japan in 1984, *Pac-Man* for the NES is so nice, they published it thrice. Twice on the NES due to a licensing issue and once on Game Boy Advance for reasons unknown, since the superior *Pac-Man Collection* was already available on the handheld.

The NES version is a competent version of the arcade original with some notable differences. To preserve the coin-op's aspect ratio, the developers compressed the maze (188 dots to the original's 240), and both the score and fruit level appear within the right margin.

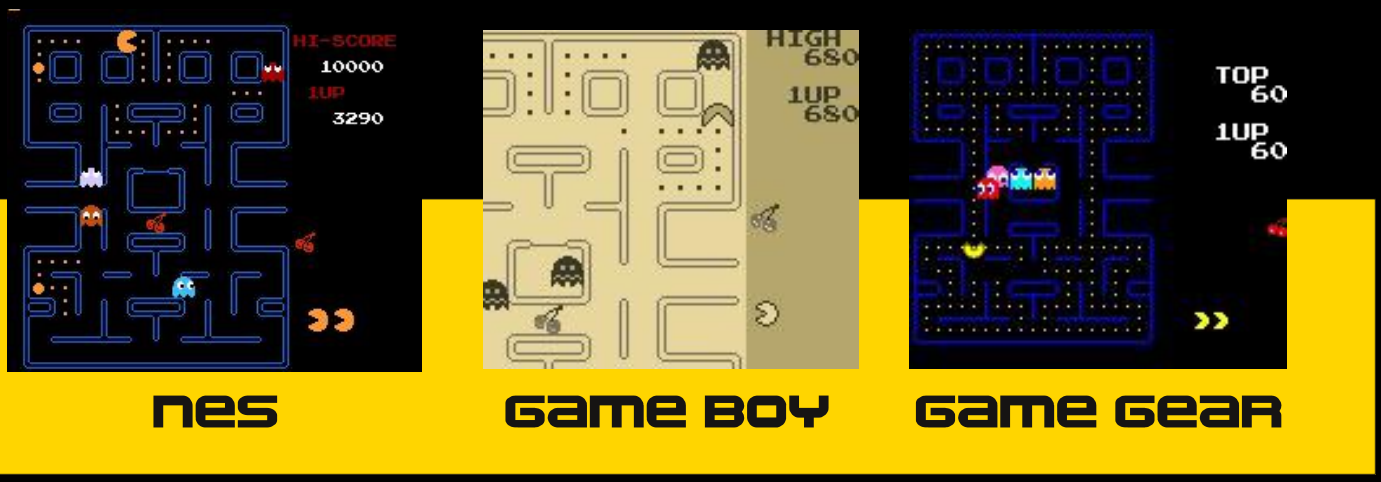
Pac-Man also looks rather large for the maze, and the sound effects are off, especially after eating an energizer. On the bright side, there's no "kill screen," so you can keep playing to your heart's content, or until your thumb gives out, whichever comes first. As part of the "Classic NES" series for Game Boy Advance (2004), the developers added battery backup to save high scores.

Game Boy 1991

The 8-bit handheld's monochromatic display means you can't identify the ghosts by color, so you can't easily distinguish speedy Blinky from bashful Inky if you're in a pinch. Gameplay involves guiding Pac-Man through a scrolling maze, giving you a close-up view of the action as you gobble up dots. The layout is identical to the NES version's, which means there are less things to consume than in the arcade original. Gameplay is otherwise strong, and the controls are fine as well. The lack of battery backup means you can't save high scores, however.

Game Gear 1991

Vibrant color, great sound effects, and a choice to play on either a scrolling maze, which moves up and down, or one that shows the entire layout on a fixed screen. The maze is identical to the one used in the NES version, with 188 dots to consume along with four energizers. Overall, a great handheld port that would later be eclipsed by the Neo Geo Pocket Color's version.



Game Boy Color 1999

This "very special" episode of *Pac-Man* is actually a re-release of the Game Boy version, albeit with colors instead of shades of gray (since it's not a "Game Boy Color Only" release, it's also playable on a regular Game Boy). As a bonus for those double-dipping, you get a version of the *Tetris*-inspired action puzzle game, *Pac-Attack*, along with *Pac-Man*.

Neo Geo Pocket Color 1999

This is a no-frills adaptation of the arcade original, but it's also the best handheld version from the time period. Everything, from the sound effects and maze layout to the speed and "feel," seems arcade perfect. There are two different ways to view the maze: from a full-screen display or one that scrolls. Those used to the handheld's loose thumbstick might balk at the controls, but Namco graciously included a small plastic ring within the package to reign in the joystick's movement to four directions. Great color and great sound, but considering its release date, it's a little disappointing that more wasn't included.

Game Boy Advance 2001

Why stop the fun at one? *Pac-Man Collection* on Game Boy Advance gives players a choice of four titles, making it a great value for those who skipped out on the two previous releases on Game Boy and Game Boy Color. Included in the compilation are *Pac-Man, Pac-Mania, Pac-Attack, and Pac-Man Arrangement*, with the latter making its U.S. debut. The most frustrating part of this collection, however, is the lack of battery backup to save high scores.

Xbox Live Arcade 2006

Pac-Man for Xbox Live Arcade is an emulated version of the arcade original with a number of customization options. As you play, you can attempt to complete 12 achievements, such as eating all four ghosts with each of the four energizers on a level. Also included is crisply displayed Pac-Man artwork that frames the screen as if you were staring at an arcade machine. While you can freely adjust parameters such as starting level or number of lives, there are no bonus modes or online support for competitive matches against a friend.

Mobile 2007 to Present

Namco's mobile versions of the arcade game feature the original maze and a choice of three difficulty settings, each influencing the speed of play: easy, normal, and original. Some versions feature on-screen joysticks or cabinet artwork, but the primary difference between titles is the control scheme. Each port relies on the device's built-in touch pad, click wheel, trackball, accelerometer, and/or touch screen to guide Pac-Man, often with mixed results.

Shovelware alert! Astro Invaders!

By Chris Cavanaugh

If you blinked, you may have missed this one. If you didn't, you may have wished you had. Not to be confused with Stern's classic coin-op *Astro Invader*, this Nintendo DS shoot-em-up from Zoo Games attempts to replicate the frantic, fixed-screen action found in *Asteroids* and *Robotron: 2084* with disastrous results.

Space pirates have taken over your sector of the galaxy for the purpose of stealing vital resources, and you're the last line of defense. Your top-down fighter's movement is controlled by the directional pad, while the stylus is used to shoot in every direction. Destroying enemies earns you coins that can be used to purchase various ship upgrades, but firepower is limited to generic choices such as "smart bombs" and involves stumbling through an unintuitive interface.

Astro Invaders' controls are clunky, and it is easy to lose track of the ship due to its ability to seamlessly blend in with enemies and environment alike. Yet the game's biggest fault is its claustrophobic level design. Drab, fuzzy ships take up valuable onscreen real estate, creating a playfield that not only is frustrating to negotiate, but also severely confining. Cut-scene and menu images are laughably bad and are reminiscent of a Photoshop user's unrestrained joy while discovering its "watercolor" effect for the first time.

Astro Invaders might have fared better as either a side- or vertical-scrolling shooter, with the goal of defending a large sector of space instead of being limited to a single, cluttered screen. While the game's retro theme and box art suggest the publisher was hoping to appeal to classic gamers, there's no reason why you should be spending any time on this shovelware when the superior *Geometry Wars: Galaxies* is available.

Pixel Memories

Kyle Snyder *reminisces about an era when arcade games could be found just about anywhere...*

Nowadays, children will never know the bliss kids in the '80s experienced when even a mundane trip with your family to run errands typically meant playing coin-op machines in several different places.

The gaming industry referred to them as "street locations" -- non-arcade businesses that devoted some floor space to serve video game players. You were almost guaranteed to find at least one game placed in every restaurant, laundromat, store, pharmacy, movie theatre, and hotel lobby. I have a strong fondness for these places, as the majority of games I played in my youth were in these street locations.

Almost every weekend, I would stay with my grandparents. After *Scooby-Doo* and *Spider-Man and his Amazing Friends* each Saturday morning, we would drive to a local pharmacy called Kay Cee Drugs to pick up the paper, play the lottery, and sometimes grab milk or a few other groceries. Sometime in 1981 a local vending company installed a nice row of four future classics right near the front door. Going from left to right on your radio dial, was *Galaxian, Berzerk, Pac-Man*, and *Zero Hour*. *Galaxian* and *Berzerk* were the standard-issue Midway and Stern classics, but the *Pac-Man* machine was outfitted with the "Hanglyman" ROM set, even though it was housed in an authentic Bally/Midway cabinet. As much as I enjoyed the "regular" *Pac-Man* maze, I always looked forward to playing Hanglyman. The open areas above and below the side tunnels were a lot of fun, as spastically rotating the joystick quickly in these areas made Pac-Man stumble around like he was drunk.

Parkland Dr / Old Silver Hill Rd, District Heights, MD, United States
Address is approximate
For Lease 703-928-5465
KING PAWN
KAY CEE

"Many quarters, many games played, and many formative hours of my youth were spent in Kay Cee and Maloney's doing what I still love best, playing arcade games."

Because this was the only place I ever saw the Hanglyman variant, I referred to it as "Kay Cee *Pac-Man*."

The fourth game, *Zero Hour*, was certainly the "odd man out" of the group. The other three games were well-known hits, but Universal's 1980 slide-and-shoot definitely lingered in obscurity even back then. It combined elements of *Galaxian* and *Asteroids*, and featured a cool landing maneuver that required you to align your spaceship on top of a dormant volcano for bonus points.

I recall two employees specifically: "Dinky" and Sheila. Dinky, whose real name I never learned, was an older woman who had worked alongside my grandmother in the 1960s as a telephone operator on Capitol Hill. She was always

so amazed in seeing "how much I'd grown" since my previous visit. I got in a lot of game time because my grandmother was able to chat with her old friend while I defended the universe. Sheila was younger, probably in her mid-twenties, with curly brown hair and a cute smile. Okay, maybe I had a slight crush on her. This was in no way because she gave me the red quarters (which were supposed to be reserved for refunds) out of the cash drawer. That only reinforced my innocent fondness for her.

I remember one visit in which I spent about three dollars in quarters that my grandfather had given me to pay for a video game magazine at a bookstore to be visited later. At least that was the original plan. While we were at Kay Cee, he mentioned that he didn't think we would get to Waldenbooks, so I naturally assumed those quarters could be spent on games. He became suspicious when my game time was lasting much longer than usual. I confessed that I was using the three dollars of quarters to play extra games. He was frustrated at first, until he realized that he did tell me we weren't going to Walden's, so he chuckled and took me there and bought the magazine anyway.

I also recall getting my second Nelsonic *Pac-Man* watch from Kay Cee. I originally got one for my birthday, but I wore it out in about two years. That second one survived much longer, until I absent-mindedly jumped into a pool while still wearing it. Game over indeed.

As the years passed, many games rotated in and out of Kay Cee's lineup. *Centipede, Tempest, Frogger, Galaga, Q*Bert, Pole Position, Ms. Pac-Man*, and *Millipede* all logged time at Kay Cee. They always had four games in a row up until about 1985 or so, when the games were removed and replaced with magazine racks or something that wasn't nearly as iconic or cool.

The other location was a charming little shop called Maloney's. This store became a huge part of my childhood

ever since dad returned from buying the Sunday paper with the glorious news that Maloney's now had two games: *Missile Command* and "Ms. Pac-Man." Surely the idea of a girl Pac-Man was preposterous, and it was obvious dad was goofing on me and my love of all things *Pac-Man*. But several minutes later he took me to Maloney's, at which point I saw and played my first *Ms. Pac-Man* machine. It was a cute little cabaret cabinet, which is precisely why I own a cabaret *Ms. Pac-Man* in my arcade collection today. (For more on this pivotal moment, check out Vol. #1, issue #6 from Spring 2001.)

Maloney's was the quintessential "mom and pop" general store. Based on the architecture, I believe the store was built in the '30s or '40s as a gas station, with the unused concrete island out front providing a clear link to its petroleum past. The interior was compact. Coolers and shelves lined the walls, and three very small aisles (maybe four feet high at best) offered goods in the center of the store. Despite the limited space, they sold a little bit of everything. Milk, soda, juice, bread, fruit, Little Debbie snack cakes (Star Crunches were my favorite), and behind the register, a selection of the finest booze this side of Charles County.

It was run by the sweetest, most kindly soul you'd ever care to meet, Grandma

Maloney. She was thin, with curly grey hair and a smile to melt your heart. My parents would always chat with her while I was racking up the high scores... or trying to. On occasion, she would give me a free quarter or some 10¢ bubble gum balls.

After testing the waters with *Missile Command* and the "mini" *Ms. Pac-Man*, the route operator rotated in other machines, but never exceeded two at a time due to space limitations. Over the years, Maloney's became the home to some rare titles, including *Stratovox, Space Encounters*, and a cabaret *Omega Race*. Common titles like *Frogger, Galaxian, Popeye, Pac-Man, Asteroids, Centipede*, and *Berzerk* were featured as well. In fact, that particular *Berzerk* became one of the very first conversions I ever noticed, as it was upgraded onsite into *Frenzy*, Stern's 1982 sequel.

However, for a few months in what I believe was 1983, the *Frogger* machine was replaced with *Merit Riviera Video Poker*. They still had the aforementioned *Frenzy*, but I was terribly disappointed in the "*Frogger* for *Riviera*" swap, as obviously, video card games held no interest for me at all. As far as I was concerned, Maloney's only had one game, *Frenzy*, during that time. I referred to this as Maloney's "dark period." Once both machines were replaced with *Popeye* and *Pac-Man*, the dark period officially ended.

Maloney's was within bike riding distance of my house. It was a little over two miles away, and was easily accessible through a dirt road connecting the rear street of my neighborhood to Crain Highway (a.k.a. Route 301), the "main drag." Folks in the neighborhood informally referred to it as Maloney's Road, which was just as much fun to ride on your bike as it was playing the games once you got there. It had several cool bumps, a few of which made nice, natural ramps, so you could catch some air on your Huffy. The open forest on either side of Maloney's Road featured a few interesting abandoned artifacts -- beat up school lockers, a miniature train engine from a kiddie ride at a nearby amusement park, and a full size 1950s Ford pickup.

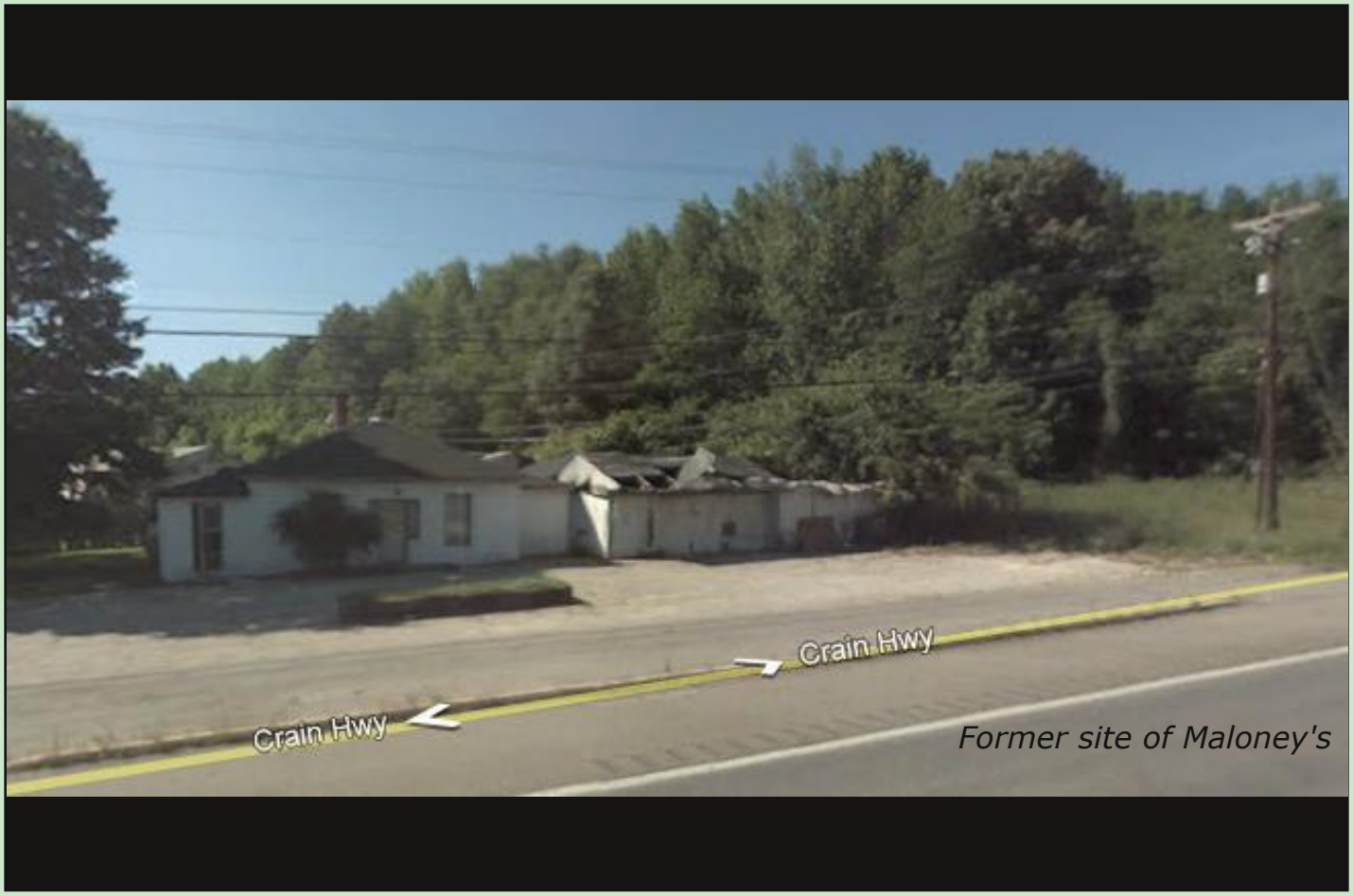
Maloney's kept the arcade games until 1986, when, just like the games at Kay Cee, they were removed and replaced with something

nowhere near as interesting. At this point I don't even recall what went in their place. Sadly, Maloney's store is no longer. Grandma Maloney retired and the family moved elsewhere in the early '90s. The store became an antique shop with a room in the back dedicated to vinyl records. By the late '90s, the store was vacant but was still being maintained.

Via the miracle that is Google Maps with Street View, I was able to see if these places still exist, from the comfort of my Ohio living room. Kay Cee Drugs is still in the same circa-1954 building at 6110 Old Silver Hill Road in District Heights, Maryland. It has a new awning and a more modern logo, but it's the same old Kay Cee I know and love.

Checking out Maloney's, however, was a sad experience. The building is still standing (at approximately 12547 Crain Highway, Newburg, MD), but it appears wholly abandoned, or at least in a serious state of disrepair. There are holes in the roof, missing shutters, a bush literally growing wild by the front door, and it just looks decrepit. Maloney's Road is completely grown over now. It's clear that the property owner has no interest in maintaining the building or an informal dirt road. Who knows if the crazy abandoned stuff is still back in the woods. If I had the money, I would totally clean the place up and reopen it as "Snyder's." Yet I wouldn't consider the renovation complete until a *Missile Command* and a cabaret *Ms. Pac-Man* once again sat in the front left corner, welcoming patrons with the soft glow of their marquees and pixelated images. Then and only then, could I open for business.

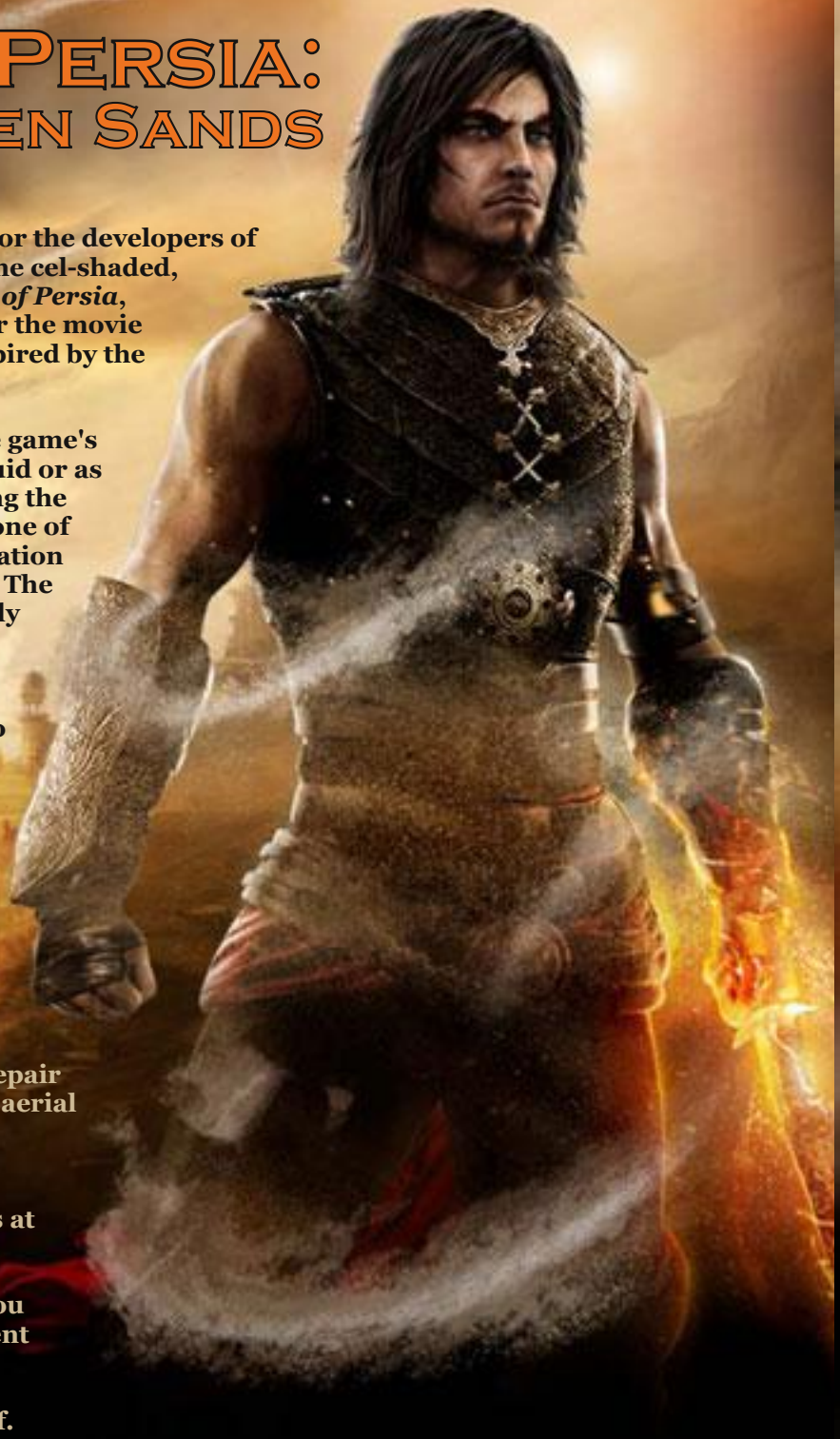
I hope you enjoyed this nostalgic trip to a couple of my favorite street locations. Even after 25 years, they still hold a special place in my heart. Many quarters, many games played, and many formative hours of my youth were spent in Kay Cee and Maloney's doing what I still love best: playing arcade games.



Former site of Maloney's

Prince of Persia: The Forgotten Sands

By Evan Phelps



It's in with the old, out with the new for the developers of *The Forgotten Sands*. Casting aside the cel-shaded, "new age" prince from 2008's *Prince of Persia*, Ubisoft returns to familiar ground for the movie tie-in to *The Sands of Time*, itself inspired by the 2003 game of the same name.

The first thing you'll notice is that the game's animation and overall look isn't as fluid or as vibrant as the 2008 game. Considering the original *Prince of Persia* trilogy was one of the best-looking franchises on PlayStation 2 and Xbox, this is a disappointment. The disenchantment spills over to the early stages of the game, where the action feels repetitive.

It's not until you're granted powers to affect the environment that the game begins to find its footing. It starts off with the familiar reversal-of-time power, used to save yourself from an unfortunate jump, followed by the abilities to create platforms and swinging bars out of water.

Towards the end, you get an ability that allows you to recall different pieces of the environment as they were from the past, allowing you to repair platforms and walls to continue your aerial acrobatics.

The game is at its best when it starts throwing several complicated puzzles at you, requiring the use of all your powers in one fluid motion to overcome them. These puzzles give you a tremendous sense of accomplishment when you finally solve them, as the various combinations require considerable concentration to pull off.

In addition to your main powers, you are also offered a chance to upgrade the prince in a limited capacity, giving him different elemental powers and improving both his life and magic. While these enhancements are mostly cosmetic, those having trouble with the game will welcome the chance to get stronger.

Those hoping Ubisoft would continue with the adventures of the new prince may find this effort missing a spring in its step. Yet those yearning for a little more from the *Sands of Time* will be pleased at the chance to revisit many of the same play mechanics. Even though the game starts a little slow, by the end you'll be too busy solving elaborate puzzles to care.

PAC-MAN'S BACK AND GAME BOY'S GOT HIM!

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The arcade classic Pac-Man makes his Game Boy™ debut in this sensational new release from Namco. Relive the adventure as you munch your way through twisting mazes filled with power pellets, bonus fruit, and those wicked ghosts! Beware of their touch- they've been known to snack on Pac's.

Hook up with a friend to double the excitement in this first 2-player Pac-Man.™ Determine the challenge by choosing the number of lives you'll need to defeat your opponent. Add fuel to the rivalry by using the handicap feature which allows two players to begin in different rounds. Gulp down a ghost and shoot'em to your opponent's maze!

There's Ghosts to gobble so get Pac'n.

namco
The Game Creator

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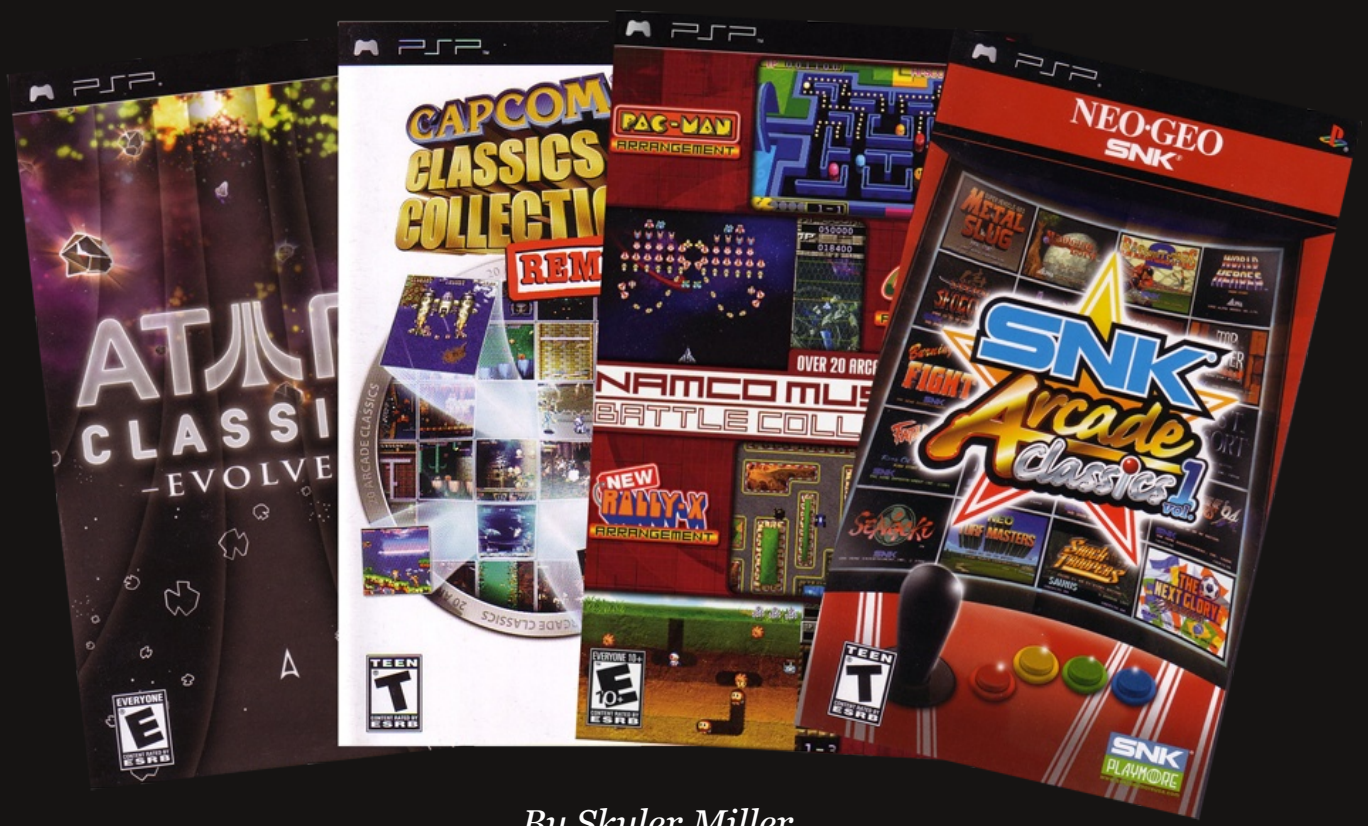
ARCADE...TO GO

CGM takes a look at four arcade compilations for the PSP. Which ones are worth taking with you?



By Skyler Miller

Atari Classics Evolved

Capcom Classics Collection Remixed

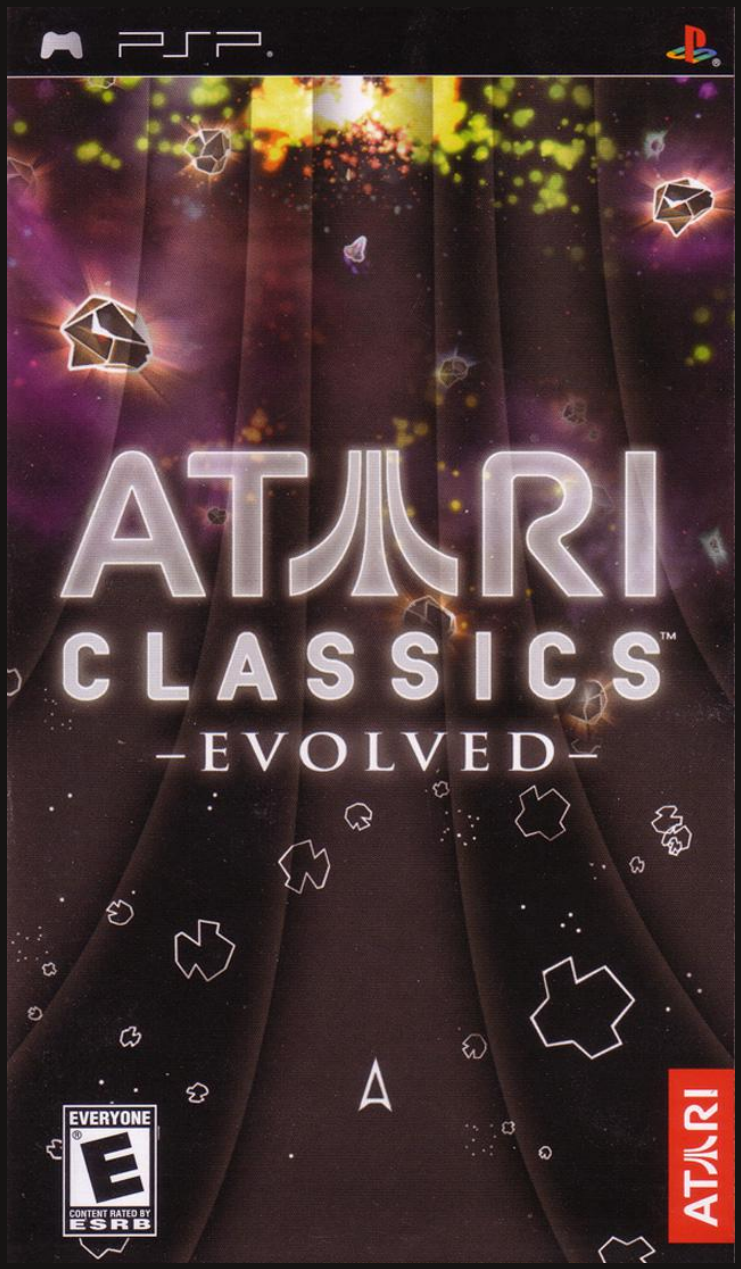
Namco Museum Battle Collection

SNK Arcade Classics

Despite its promise of evolution, *Atari Classics Evolved* can't help but feel a bit stale. It contains the familiar lineup of Atari arcade games -- *Asteroids, Missile Command, Centipede*, etc. -- found in other compilations, with 11 games in total. Each game comes in its original form along with an "evolved" version that updates the graphics and sound to about the level of a basic online Flash game. In most cases, these evolved versions are also easier to play than the originals because the visuals are better suited to the small screen.

None of the games is particularly well-suited for portable play, though. The analog stick is only passable as a replacement for the trackball, spinner, tank controls, and paddles of the originals. Vertical-oriented games like *Centipede, Millipede* and *Super Breakout* are only playable by turning the PSP upright, and there are no options for scaling the display of any of the games.

Ironically, the biggest selling point of *Atari Classics Evolved* for many classic gamers may be a bonus feature: the 50 unlockable Atari 2600 games contained on the disc. However, in order to unlock these titles, you must achieve all four "awards" in each of the 11 games. Hiding away such a large amount of content in an all-or-nothing manner may not be your cup of tea, so for those unable (or unwilling) to earn all of the awards, you can download a save game that unlocks all of the Atari 2600 games. Regardless of how you unlock the games, though, having access to favorites like *Yars' Revenge, Adventure* and *Haunted House* greatly increase the value of the collection as a whole.



Asteroids
Asteroids Deluxe
Battlezone
Centipede
Lunar Lander
Millipede
Missile Command
Pong
Super Breakout
Tempest
Warlords
50 Atari 2600 games

With *Capcom Classics Collection Remixed*, Capcom has created a polished compilation of 20 arcade games, though exactly what has been "remixed" about them isn't clear.

The lineup is fairly balanced, with shooters like *1941*, beat-em-ups like *Final Fight*, the *Breakout*-esque *Block Block* and the unique trivia game *Quiz & Dragons*. But many of these games, such as *Avengers, Last Duel* and the original *Street Fighter*, aren't exactly classics.

There are also some notable Capcom favorites missing, such as *Street Fighter II* and *Ghosts 'n Goblins*; you'll have to buy Capcom *Classics Collection Reloaded* to get those.

On the plus side, you're able to scale and rotate the screen to your liking, especially helpful for the games that are vertically oriented. Unlockable art, tips and music are available for completing specific goals in each game, and ad-hoc wireless multiplayer is available on every game if there's someone nearby who also has a copy.

1941	Mega Twins
Bionic Commando	Quiz & Dragons
Black Tiger	Section Z
Final Fight	Side Arms
Forgotten Worlds	Speed Rumbler
Last Duel	Street Fighter
Legendary Wings	Strider
Magic Sword	Varth

Namco has never been shy about capitalizing on its library of arcade classics, and *Namco Museum Battle Collection* is a well-designed compilation that features an excellent lineup of classic games, a clean presentation, and a wireless multiplayer mode that doesn't require multiple copies of the game.

There are 17 games included, plus "arrangements" of *Pac-Man, Dig Dug, Galaga* and *New Rally-X* that upgrade the visuals, sound and gameplay to a slightly more modern look-and-feel. Only the four arrangement games can be played using wireless multiplayer, but you are able to send the first level of 10 other games wirelessly to another PSP. The selection is diverse with no glaring omissions, but if you think really hard, you might wish for *Pole Position, Sky Kid*, or some of the later *Pac-Man* sequels.

There are no goals or bonuses to collect, which is actually a little refreshing since everything is available to you right from the start. There are plenty of customization options too, such as adjusting for horizontal or vertical orientation, and the ability to stretch and zoom the screen. Most of Namco's arcade games originally used vertical monitors, so it's nice to be able to choose how you want them displayed.

Of the four collections reviewed here, *Namco Museum: Battle Collection* is the best all-around, all-purpose choice for arcade gaming on the go.

Bosconian
Dig Dug
Dig Dug Arr.
Dig Dug II
Dragon Buster
Galaga
Galaga Arr.
Galaxian
Grobda
King & Balloon
Mappy
Motos
Ms. Pac-Man
New Rally-X
New Rally-X Arr.
Pac-Man
Pac-Man Arr.
Rally-X
Rolling Thunder
Tower of Druaga
Xevious

There's no sugarcoating it -- the load times on this collection are inexcusable. The quickest you'll be able to get from “power on” to actually playing a game is about 2 minutes and 15 seconds. Exiting from a game back to the main menu takes about 30 seconds. If you're looking for a quick gaming fix on the go, this isn't it by a long shot.

Just like SNK's lineup for the Neo Geo, the selection skews toward one-on-one fighting games, which make up 6 of the 16 selections. But baseball, soccer and golf are also represented, as are shooters and beat-em-ups. One of the games, *World Heroes*, isn't initially available and must be unlocked by reaching certain goals in the other games. Other unlockables include art, music and videos.

Die-hard fans of fighting games and the Neo Geo may be able to overlook this collection's laughably long load times. For everyone else, it's a no-brainer to give this one a pass.

Art of Fighting
Baseball Stars 2
Burning Fight
Fatal Fury
King of the Monsters
Last Resort
Magician Lord
Metal Slug
Neo Turf Masters
Samurai Shodown
Sengoku
Shock Troopers
Super Sidekicks 3
King of Fighters '94
Top Hunter
World Heroes

ANOTHER TRIP INSIDE... HAUNTED HOUSE

Get ready to readjust your eyeballs for the dark as Atari dusts off and upgrades the 2600 classic *Haunted House* for current generation systems. Thirty years have passed since Samuel Silverspring visited Spirit Bay and explored spooky Graves Mansion. Now it's up to his grandchildren to restore the family's legacy by piecing together Zachary Graves' magic urn. In the tradition of the original, players will encounter poltergeists, creepy creatures, and gargoyles while relying on keys, supernatural books and sources of light to solve puzzles and escape unscathed. New to the franchise are boss battles, hidden treasures and an eerie 3D environment. *Haunted House* will be released in time for Halloween for Wii (retail), and Xbox 360 and PC via digital download.

- Chris Cavanaugh

3D Dot Game Heroes: Inspiration or Imitation?

By Chris Brown

From the outset of *3D Dot Game Heroes*, two things are made plainly clear: The game is an unabashed clone of *The Legend of Zelda*, and the developers at From Software never let the task of emulating a classic franchise get in the way of lighthearted fun.

Both revelations serve as double-edged swords, however, with the persistent *Zelda* imitation likely to inspire nostalgia and outrage in equal parts, and the game's playful narrative keeping things light, but ultimately preventing players from forming any sort of emotional connection to the characters.

Countless games have taken a stab at reproducing the *Zelda* series' mystique, from early knockoffs like Golden *Axe Warrior* and *Golvellius: The Valley of Doom*, to the village-building twists of *Dark Cloud* and the Skittles-driven absurdity of *Darkened Skye*. But never before has a game so deliberately sought to copy *The Legend of Zelda* in such a complete manner. From broad imitations of the plot, music, weapons, items, and enemies, to far more specific imitations, such as the largely useless overworld map, the swarming flocks of enraged chickens, and even the sad swaths of real estate that inexplicably suffer from perpetual rock slides,

nearly every aspect of *3D Dot Game Heroes* has been borrowed from *The Legend of Zelda*, or its Super NES progeny, *A Link to the Past*.

The game does offer a few features that aren't wholly derivative (of *Zelda*, at least), such as the ability to select from a variety of pre-made characters or create a new protagonist from scratch. The editor resembles a three-dimensional *Tetris* grid, and it allows players to design "characters" ranging from a single pixel to a hulking cube that fills the entire grid. The controls in the editor are a tad clunky, but the learning curve isn't terribly steep, so most gamers will be able to design their very own Link in as few as 15 minutes. From that point, though, things begin to get quite familiar.

With its mix of Arthurian legend, Tolkienesque fantasy,

and *Zelda* gameplay, the *3D Dot Game Heroes* mythology is not exactly groundbreaking. The story puts players in the role of a young hero who journeys off to find a legendary sword, collect six magical orbs, rescue a princess, and ultimately save the Kingdom of Dotnia from the malevolent Dark King. For as derivative as the plot is, the developers should be commended for the competency with which their game emulates its source material. The graphics flawlessly translate the look of 8- and 16-bit games into the world of 3D games, and the music perfectly captures the synthesized melodies of the era.

But for all its effort, it never quite captures the masterful pace and tremendous balance that made Miyamoto's games so great. The original *Legend of Zelda* expertly toed the line between challenging and difficult, refusing to hold players' hands as it dropped them in the middle of a massive world. That lack of instruction was the groundbreaking genius behind the game, because it required players to explore the world around them, rewarding curiosity at every turn.

It's simply impossible for *3D Dot Game Heroes* to duplicate the long-term impact of an archetypal game released more than two decades ago, but replicating the tempo of Link's Super Nintendo debut is nearly as difficult. *A Link to the Past* seamlessly weaved narrative, combat, and multiple avenues of exploration, all while

maintaining a singularity of purpose that made every conversation and side mission feel necessary. It is in this regard that *3D Dot Game Heroes* stumbles significantly. Its dungeons are well designed, but they rarely contain integral items, and the bosses never seem to fit the levels.

Meanwhile, many of the side missions come off as extremely arbitrary, often rewarding

gamers with special items for no apparent reason. The majority of these items can never actually be used, and tracking them down isn't so much a matter of using intuition, but simply revisiting villages and talking to characters after any minor event. It comes off as unnecessary fluff designed to pad the game time and sate the completionist nature of many modern gamers. And for a clone of *The Legend of Zelda*, *3D Dot Game Heroes* pays curiously scant attention to its princess, even letting players win without rescuing her. Fortunately, the narrative missteps are offset by the fact that *3D Dot Game Heroes* never takes itself too seriously. There are a handful of jokes about the game's visuals, from the king demanding that his 2D realm evolve to 3D to attract tourists, to an exasperated villager complaining that three dimensions are much harder to clean than two. The manner in which players catalogue the beasts they have conquered is humorously literal, and the developers have inserted a number of comical references to other From Software games, like *Demon's Souls* and *Armored Core*.

A deftly made product, *3D Dot Game Heroes* offers a bug-free challenge that never becomes prohibitively difficult, and in its constant attempts to duplicate the superficial qualities of *The Legend of Zelda*, it occasionally hits notes that are pitch-perfect. But it never reaches a level of excellence, simply because it can't compare to the games it fastidiously apes. That says more about the source material than the facsimile, but a game has to be considered disappointing when its only real accomplishment is reminding players of *The Legend of Zelda*'s greatness.

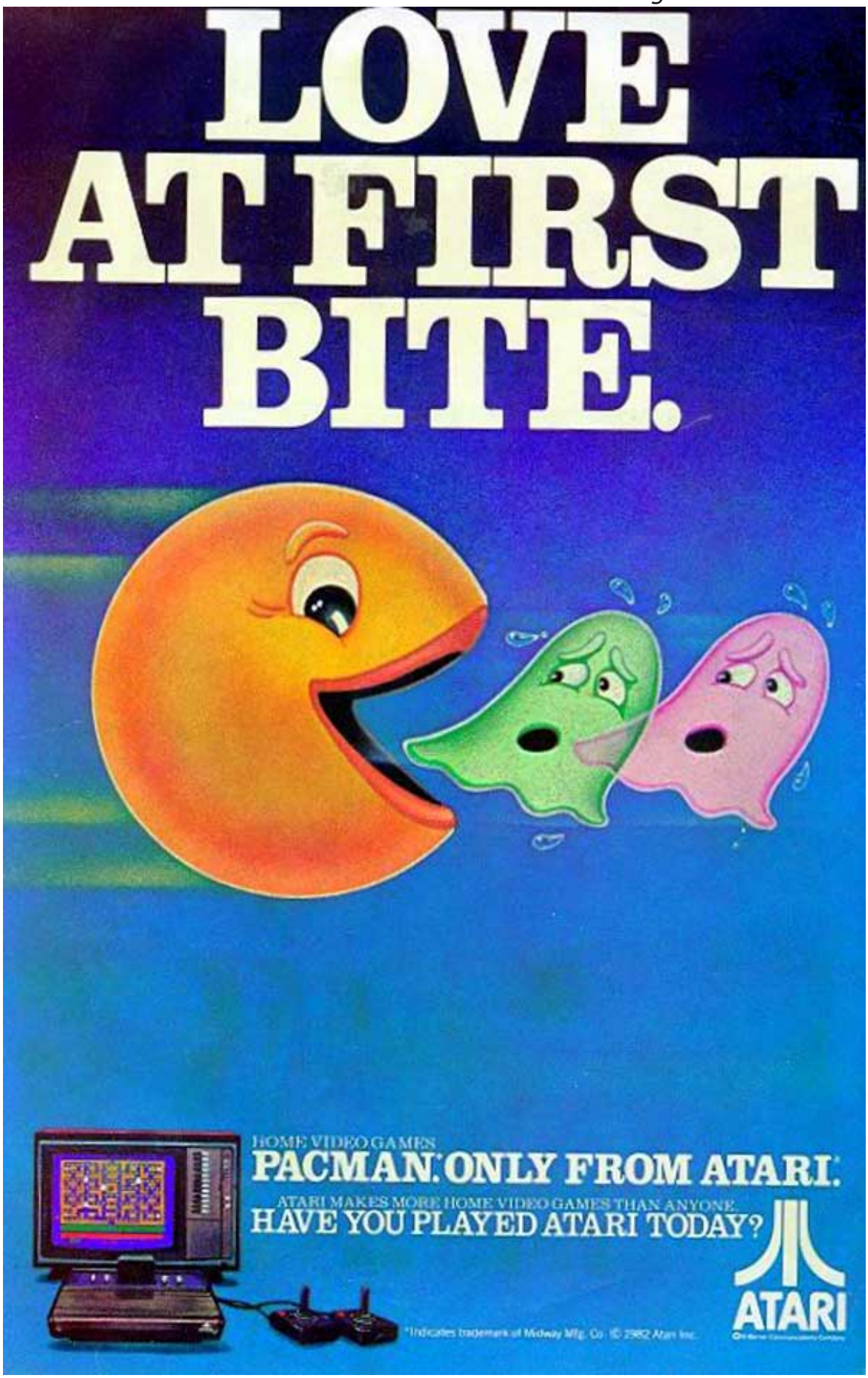
What's New in Arcades?

Elevator Action: Death Parade
Taito continues its long-running franchise in this first-person shooter that pits players against a variety of monsters and other baddies. The unique arcade cabinet features real elevator doors that slide open and closed to reveal the action as one or two players blast their way through a multi-level skyscraper. Although this title has seen wide release in Japan, it may be more difficult to track down in U.S. arcades.

Tetris Giant
This release arms players with gigantic joysticks (featuring force feedback) as they attempt to drop and group Tetriminoes on a 7 x 6 grid. Modes include two-player co-op, versus and timed, as well as solo challenges. If you can't track one of these down in the arcade you can always save your quarters to purchase one for the princely sum of $10,000.

- Chris Cavanaugh

Vintage advertisement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Words from the Weiss

By Chris Cavanaugh

Pop-culture expert Brett Weiss has written numerous articles that have appeared in Comic Buyer's Guide, Fangoria, Allgame.com, and past issues of Classic Gamer Magazine. Brett recently authored two books: *Classic Home Video Games: 1972-1984* and *Classic Home Video Games: 1985-1988* and agreed to talk to us about the challenges of writing, getting published, and how mowing lawns is good for the game collector's soul.

Convincing a major book publisher to publish a book isn't easy. Can you tell us how the initial deal happened? Did you approach them or was it the other way around?

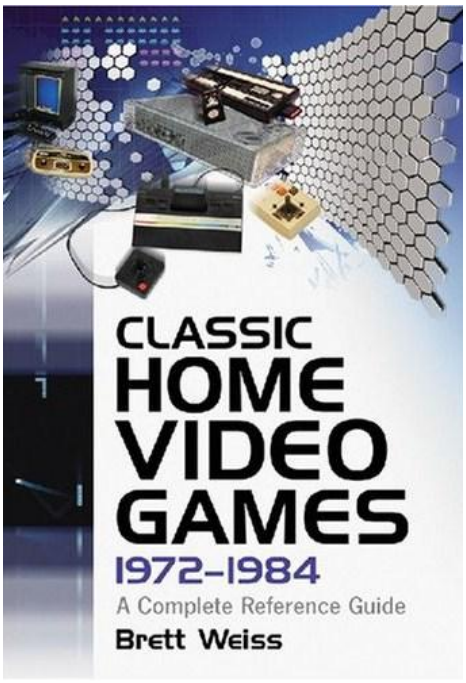
McFarland Publishers, which publishes a variety of scholarly entertainment books, had a booth at Comic-Con International in San Diego in 2006, and I introduced myself to one of their editors. I gave her a business card and told her to contact me if I could contribute to any of their books. Three days after I returned home, I received an email from that editor, asking me if I had any interesting book ideas. I pounded out a proposal and some sample entries, emphasizing that a book like mine had never been done before: descriptions/reviews/data for every single game for every U.S.-released classic programmable system. They approved the idea pretty quickly. During the early-to-mid 1990s, I worked up a proposal for a similar book, but I couldn't find a publisher.

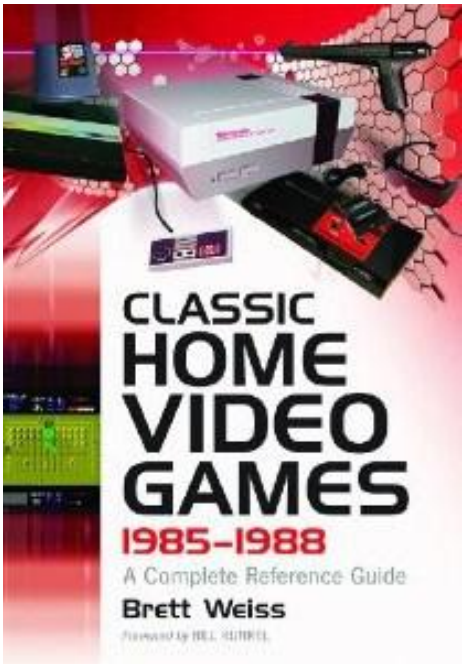
How much influence does the publisher have on content? Did you have to make sacrifices?

The publisher was very receptive to my original proposal, and both books are pretty much exactly like I conceived and wrote them. During the editors' meeting, my proposal was approved unanimously. They loved the nostalgic content, the quality of the writing, and the comprehensive nature of the books. The only sticking point was their insistence on spelling the word "videogame" as two words.

What are the challenges associated with writing these books?

Condensing a long RPG or point-and-click adventure down to a clear and concise, yet detailed overview.





Trudging through horrible games. Getting far enough into really hard games to describe and review them accurately and fairly. The sheer exhaustion of having to write about the games in addition to playing them. Not having enough time to play new games because I'm so busy with the old systems. Luckily, I largely prefer older

games, but I'd love to have enough time and energy to pick up a PS3 and play through *God of War III* and *Batman: Arkham Asylum*. On the other hand, I love discovering obscure gems that I had never played before, such as the wildly inventive and hugely entertaining *Killer Bees!* for the Odyssey2. That was the last game I wrote about for my first book—I had to buy the game on eBay.

What was their reasoning for wanting to release the books in hardcover? Did you try to convince them otherwise? Do you think the decision has helped or hurt sales?

I had absolutely no say in the matter. I was flattered that the books were published in hardcover, but I have met resistance by some potential buyers because of the hardcover pricing. On the other hand, everyone I've talked to who has bought either book is very happy with their purchase(s). People tell me they refer to my books again and again, and that's the best compliment I could ever get. I'm also frequently told that the books are well written, which is always good to hear.

Is there talk about making these books available in paperback?

Nothing yet, but hopefully some day.

What percentage of research goes into your books vs. how much you just know off the top of your head?

I wouldn't quite say that the books wrote themselves, but I have been playing these games nonstop since they came out. The first system I actually owned was a ColecoVision when I was 15, but prior to the release of the ColecoVision, I was constantly going over to friends' and relatives' houses to play their systems. In fact, my two best friends each had a Fairchild Channel F of all things. After I got my ColecoVision for Christmas of 1982 (I actually had to kick in $100 of my lawn mowing money to make it happen), I began collecting games like crazy (my second system was an Atari 2600 with 10 games that I bought off a classmate for the incredibly low price of $10.00). I would get new systems as they would come out, but I never got rid of my older systems. I simply kept adding to them as I would find older games on clearance and at garage sales, flea markets, and thrift stores. Despite my familiarity with old games, I still do tons of research to make sure I get everything as accurate as possible, and to refresh my memory for games I haven't played in a long time.

"Despite my familiarity with old games, I still do tons of research to make sure I get everything as accurate as possible."

Do you use any magazines or sites for research? Which ones?

Thanks to their instruction manual scans, AtariAge and Nintendo Age were absolutely invaluable when I was writing my first two books. As everyone knows, it's much tougher to find manuals than game cartridges. I also used gamefaqs walkthroughs a few times when I had trouble getting past a certain area or level in a particularly hard or confusing game. Digital Press has been helpful as well. When a game's manual or title screen doesn't mention who the developer is, and when various websites have conflicting information, I sometimes ask on the Digital Press message boards, and I usually get a response. Of course, I will then do more research to determine if the information they gave me is accurate.

Just to get inside your head a little bit, can you tell us about what goes into your writing process?

I play the games in the evening and wake up early the next morning -- oftentimes as early as 3 or 4 a.m. -- to write about them. Prior to sitting down to my desk, I'll fire up a steaming hot cup of Earl Grey tea. I tried Earl Grey back when Captain Picard would order it from the food replicator on *Star Trek: The Next Generation* (yes, I'm a geek), and quickly became addicted to it. I've been a freelance writer for almost 20 years, so I've got a pretty good routine in place. Comfortable pants/shorts and a good, sturdy chair that supports the back are absolutely essential. I write most every morning (and most afternoons), but I sometimes take Saturday morning off if my kids get up when I do.

How long did it take to write each of the books?

The first book took about a year. C*lassic Home Video Games, 1985-1988* took over two years, partly because most of the games from that era are longer and more complex.

How has the feedback been from those who've purchased the books? Have there been any interesting suggestions?

The feedback has largely been terrific. Both books have reviewed extremely well. The most frequent comment I get is that people use the books when they are looking to purchase some older games they may enjoy. This is followed closely by people using the books because they can't remember a specific fact about a particular game, or just because they're fun to flip through. Some readers comment that they wish the photos were in color, but that is entirely up to the publisher.

Approximately how many copies have the books sold?

I would tell you, but then I'd have to kill you. I can tell you that the first book has almost sold through its first printing, which is nice. With the new book, it's too early to tell.

What era of gaming do you enjoy most and why?

While I've had a truly great time with such titles as *Halo, God of War, Wii Sports*, and *Burnout*, my favorite games are from the late '70s and early '80s. Games like *Dig Dug, Galaga, Super Pac-Man, Zoo Keeper* and *Phoenix* are simple but challenging, intense, strategic, and endlessly replayable. *Mr. Do!* is my all-time favorite game. I still keep records of my highest scores on many of my favorite old games (again, the geek factor rears its ugly head).

In another interview, you said that your favorite platform was the ColecoVision. Of all the platforms you've written about, what makes the ColecoVision so special in your eyes?

I love how Coleco took such second (and third) tier arcade games as *Frenzy, Carnival, Lady Bug, Pepper II, Space Panic, Slither*, and *Mouse Trap*, emulated them beautifully, and made them available for home play. These were great games that were unfairly overlooked until they made it into gamers' living rooms. Since you could play the games again and again without having to put in a quarter every time, you could take the time to truly discover how great these games were. Plus, there are great third-party titles like *Jumpman Junior* and *Miner 2049'er*. Some complain about the controllers, but I like them. My favorite modern system is the PS2, partly because of its many arcade classics collections, but also because of some great modern games like *Lumines, REZ*, and *Maximo: Ghosts to Glory*.

Can you tell us anything about the third book you are currently writing?

Absolutely! It will cover the Genesis, Neo Geo, and TurboGrafx-16. Hopefully, it will be out some time in mid-late 2011.

Brett's blog can be read at http://brettweisswords.blogspot.com/

Scott Pilgrim vs. the World: The Game
Developer: Ubisoft Chengdu, Publisher: Ubisoft
Format: Digital Download, Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360
Cost: $10/800 points
Reviewed by: Scott Marriott

Inspired by both the graphic novel series and Universal Pictures film, the video game version of *Scott Pilgrim vs. the World* is a throwback to such calloused-thumb classics as *Double Dragon* and *River City Ransom*. The pixelated visuals, thick characters, and energetic soundtrack are all reminiscent of the 8-bit era, albeit with a modern-day sheen. While the retro-themed presentation is a knowing nod to the past, the action itself feels dated. Nearly all of the beat-em-up genre's faults are included in the game, perhaps in a misguided attempt to be "authentic."

Gameplay involves punching and kicking throngs of punks, robots, ninjas, and similar baddies while moving from left to right in a series of seven stages. Each stage ends in an amusing boss battle against one of Ramona Flowers' former love interests. Located throughout each themed environment are one or more shops you can enter to purchase food, books, drinks, or similar items that will either replenish lost health or permanently increase your character's stats in such areas as speed, strength, defense and "gut points." The latter helps you recover from being knocked out and also powers up certain attacks.

Building up your stats is important early on, since your character is painfully slow and incredibly weak. You'll have to slog through the first level a few times to get enough money (coins fall from defeated foes) to make your character more bearable. Defeating enemies also earns you experience to gain levels, with each level adding one additional fighting move to your repertoire. Basic fast and slow attacks are modified by jumping in the air or crouching on the ground. You can also pick up weapons, dash and block.

Pilgrim's problems are plentiful. The large characters make the environments feel cramped, and the act of picking up weapons, or connecting with certain baddies, is challenging because it's not always clear if you're in the right "lane." Since enemies tend to bunch up along the screen's edge, it's better to move slowly and methodically through a level to minimize fighting against too large a group. Your character's default speed is way too slow, and his or her dash is way too fast, making for sloppy, imprecise play. Other issues are typical of the genre: levels are too linear, interaction is limited, and there are no side

objectives or goals other than to make it through an area in one piece.

The game's biggest fault is its repetitiveness, which is primarily a result of your limited and boring move set. This could have been addressed with better character customization. The leveling system makes little sense, since it's possible to max out your character before you get to the final stage, and there are no choices to make in regards to new attacks. While there are five playable characters, they share nearly identical moves. Some attacks are useless, so you'll end up relying on the same two or three techniques simply because they are the most efficient way to take down enemies.

If we were to judge *Scott Pilgrim* solely on its faithfulness to the genre, it would earn high marks. Classic gamers will be pleasantly surprised at how genuine the game looks, sounds, and feels to earlier titles. The replay value is enhanced to a degree with a zombie survival mode, a boss rush mode, and four-player cooperative action, though the latter is limited to sofa sharing around the same television. Yet when compared to a title like *Castle Crashers*, which offers more depth, variety, and humor, *Pilgrim* is a bit disappointing. Not for where it goes, but for where it doesn't.

Scott Pilgrim vs. The World: The Movie
Reviewed by: Jason Buchanan

Scott Pilgrim vs. The World is a retro gamer's movie fantasy made real, a comic book adaptation with an 8-bit heart that pumps with the pixelated blood of pop-culture nostalgia. A caffeine blast directly to the brain, it's a dazzling display of frenetic cinema energy created by geeks, for geeks. And while that might make the mainstream appeal rather limited (as indicated by the film's lackluster performance at the box-office -- apparently lovelorn rockers are no match for macho mercenaries), it's destined for cult status in the hearts of hardcore gamers, comic book aficionados and movie junkies alike.

Yet as genuine as it all feels, by the time Pilgrim is preparing to face down with the last of Ramona Flowers' seven evil ex's, all this sugary goodness may leave your brain feeling like your stomach after binging on too much Halloween candy. Because of that, it may be better enjoyed in small doses once it's released to the home video market, where it will likely find a wider audience for a good reason: There are just so many references and visual treats being constantly hurled at the viewer, it's hard to catch them all. Edgar Wright makes movies (and shows) that benefit from repeat viewing, and fans of both the comic and the feature will have plenty to dissect and relish once they can analyze *Scott Pilgrim* frame-by-frame.

HAPPY 30TH BIRTHDAY, PAC-MAN!